

# IN THE SWIM

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE





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IN THE SWIM.



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*A Story of  
Currents and Under-Currents  
in Gayest New York.*

By  
Richard Henry Savage



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## CONTENTS.

### BOOK I.

#### A RISING STAR.

CHAPTER.	PAGES
I — "Young Lochinvar has Come out of the West," . . .	5-23
II — The Drift of a Day in New York City, . . . . .	24-43
III — A Frank Disclosure, . . . . .	44-67
IV — "Wyman and Vreeland" Swing the Street, . . .	68-88
V — Toward the Zenith, . . . . .	89-110

### BOOK II.

#### WITH THE CURRENT.

VI — In the "Elmleaf" Bachelor Apartments, . . .	111-131
VII — "Plunger" Vreeland's Gay Life, "Under the Rose,"	132-151
VIII — Miss Romaine Garland, Stenographer, . . . .	152-170
IX — Senator Alynton's Colleague, . . . . .	171-188
X — An Interview at Lakemere. Some Ingenious Mechanism. "Whose Picture is That?" . .	189-209

### BOOK III.

#### ON A LEE SHORE.

XI — Miss Marble's Waterloo! A Lost Lamb! Her Vacant Chair. Senator Garston's Disclosure. Sara Conyer's Mission. Miss Garland's Dishon- orable Discharge. A Defiance to the Death. "Robbed!" . . . . .	210-234
XII — Mine and Countermines, . . . . .	235-257
XIII — A Wedding in High Life, . . . . .	258-279
XIV — For the Child's Sake! . . . . .	280-315
XV — In the Dark Waters, . . . . .	316-361



# IN THE SWIM.

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## BOOK I—A RISING STAR.

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### CHAPTER I.

“YOUNG LOCHINVAR HAS COME OUT OF THE WEST.”

There was an expression of sullen discontent upon the handsome features of Mr. Harold Vreeland (gentleman unattached), as the inbound Hudson River train dashed along under the castled cliffs of Rhinebeck.

The afternoon was fair—the river of all rivers glittered gaily in the sun, and a dreamy peace rested on field and stream. But, the peace of this June afternoon of '95 entered not into the young wayfarer's soul.

The five years which the traveler from nowhere in particular had thrown away in the far wilds of the sporadic West had not yet robbed his chiseled features of the good looks which he had borne away from old Nassau.

And, though his glittering blue eye had been trained to a habitual impassiveness by much frontier poker, he had always abjured that Rocky Mountain whisky which “biteth like an adder.”

As he restlessly sought the smoking-car, after a



vain struggle with the all too-evident immorality of a saucy French novel, several quickly thrilled spinsters followed his retreating form with warm glances of furtive admiration and half-suppressed sighs.

Vreeland's stalwart figure was clearly reminiscent of well-played football and long straining at the oar. His well-set head was bravely carried, his eye was searching and even audaciously daring in its social explorations.

At twenty-seven he had not lost the fascination of his soft and perfectly modulated voice nor the winning insinuation of his too frequent smile. The chin was far too softly molded for an ascetic, and an expression of lurking insincerity flickered in the pleasure-loving curves of his handsome mouth.

But, shapely and glowing with manly vigor, he was a very "proper man-at-arms" in the battle of life, his sweeping cavalry mustache lending an air of decision to his sun-burned features.

Though he was perfectly dressed up to the memories of his never-forgotten "varsity" grade, the "wander-jahre" had given to him a little of that easy swing which is the gift of wandering on boundless prairies, long nights spent *al fresco* under the glittering dome of stars, and a close commune with the sighing pines of the West.

The shade of bitterness deepened upon his moody face as he noted a three-masted steam yacht swinging along up the river, with the elastic quivering throb of her quadruple compounded engines. This queenly vessel bore the private signal of one American citizen whose personal finances beggar the resources of many modern kings.

"Those are the cold-hearted fellows who rule

America now with a rod of iron—the new money kings,” he growled. “Royal by the clink of the dollar, sovereign by the magic wand of monopoly, impregnable with the adamant armor of trusts!”

And then, a lively hatred of the social grandees luxuriously grouped aft on that splendid yacht crept into his embittered soul.

He could see the Venetian awning which covered the clustered fair-faced patrician women from the fierce sun, which rudely burns by day.

And he knew, too, by distant rumors of that superb luxury in which the American women of the creed of the Golden Calf passed their happy days in a splendid and serene indolence, only lit up now and then with gleams of the passion play of high life.

“It’s no use to fight those fellows,” mused Vreeland, as he carefully trimmed a cigar. “They have come to stay, and I must try and fall into the train of some one of them.”

He looked back at all those unprofitable years spent beyond the rugged Rockies. There was a sense of shame and resentment as he recalled the shabby career of his talented father.

“Thank God, I am now alone in the world, ‘with no one nigh to hender!’” he bitterly reflected, unconsciously quoting Lowell’s “Zekle and Huldry.”

The train had rushed on past Poughkeepsie, and the parade music from West Point floated sweetly across the cool river as the train halted at Garrison’s for a few moments, before he had morosely reviewed all the dismal events which brought him a lonely stranger back to New York.

Erastus Vreeland, a lawyer of no mean accomplishment, had destined his only son for the bar.

The elder Vreeland was a human spider, who had finally gravitated downward into the exercise of only the meaner craft of his much-abused profession.

For long years, in his little office on William Street he had legally carried on the intrigues of a daring band of clients who rightly should have ornamented the Academy of Belles-Lettres of New York at Sing Sing.

During the life of his hoodwinked wife, Vreeland *père* led a double existence of more or less moral turpitude, and, at last, a shameless and successful coup of rascality aroused the ire of a great financial company.

It was his "notice to quit," and after the death of his wife, Erastus Vreeland "swung round the distant circle," often followed by the *declassé* lawyer.

Omaha, Leadville, Salt Lake, Los Angeles, and other Western cities finally knew his fox-like cunning and gradually weakening grip.

A political affray, the result of a heated election in Montana, had been the occasion of the elder Vreeland's sudden taking off.

And so, the man who had never learned the homely adage that "corruption wins not more than honesty," slept far away from his fathers on the rocky hillsides of Helena, in wild Montana. It was a miserable summation of failures.

The hegira of the father had left the son stranded in life at the start upon his finishing the four years at Princeton which had made him an expert in all the manly arts save any definite plan of money-getting.

A still self-deceiving man, Erastus Vreeland had hopefully invited his son to share the suggested exile, and thus, the plan of the law course for the junior was

perforce abandoned. It had not been long till father and son drifted coldly apart.

The mean, shabby moral nature of the demoralized elder could not long impose upon the quick-witted youth. The slights of the bench, the slurs of the bar, the wasp-like thrusts of a bold frontier press, all proved that the "trail of the serpent" followed on after the talented weakling whose professional honor was never proof against gold or gain secured from either side.

And so, with only a hypocritical pretense of a certain lingering friendly feeling, the two men had finally parted, dividing a few hundred dollars which were the remains of a retainer in a case, which deftly went wrong on its trial, sold out, to the benefit of lawyer Vreeland's adversary. Then came the bloody finale—and, and—exit Vreeland *pater!*

Harold Vreeland sighed in disgust as he recalled the five lost years of his golden youthful promise.

"It's all rot," he muttered, "this idea that the loafer life of the far West gives either scope, strength, or courage to any man. It is all mere barbarism, and only a windy discounting of a future which never comes. A long, bootless struggle with the meaner conditions of life."

He recalled his varied experiences as notary public, deputy county clerk, cashier of a shoddy bank—a concern which "folded its Arabian tents" in six months.

Real estate dealer he had been in several aspiring "boom towns," and also, secretary of many frontier "wind" corporations, whose beautifully engraved stock certificates were now either carried around in the pocketbooks of dupes or else stuck up in Western saloons, to the huge edification of the ungodly.

This strange wandering life had made him a fox in cunning, though not as yet a ravening wolf, for there was little to prey upon in those dreary distant Occidental preserves. But, his fangs were well sharpened for the fray.

He realized, as the lights of Haverstraw gleamed out "beyond the swelling tide," that he was as yet without any definite plan of operations.

A singular incident, illustrative of the roughly good-humored social code of the wild West had caused him to seek the city of Manhattan.

The political clique which had coolly plotted the murder of his crafty father, with a last generous twinge of conscience, had sent all the private papers of the defunct lawyer over to his son, who was listlessly engaged at the time in endeavoring, on a net cash capital of a hundred and fifty dollars, to float a ten million dollar corporation, in order to utilize certain waste energy of those foaming falls of the Spokane River, which have so long caused both the salmon and the Indians a great deal of unnecessary trouble.

And then, young Vreeland wearily explored those ashes of life—the "papers in the case" of the defunct.

The unwelcome discovery of many evidences of his father's shame and the revealing of all that secret life which had sent his patient mother to the shadowy bourne of heartbroken wives, was somewhat mitigated by the discovery of a paid-up policy of ten thousand dollars in the great "Acqueduct Life Insurance of New York City."

There was, as usual, some strings and filaments hanging out loosely knotted up, and it had been a labor of months, involving a correspondence of some acerbity, for him to obtain letters of administration,



close up his father's "estate," and depart to Gotham to receive a check for seven thousand dollars in full settlement of the claim.

On the road over from Spokane, Mr. Harold Vree-land had carefully counted all his ships. He had even gone over all his own abortive attempts at opening any useful career, and so, on this summer evening, he gloomily felt how poorly prepared he was to fight the battle of life against the keen competition and increasing pressure of his peers in New York City.

"If I had only my father's profession, I would have a chance to get in among these fellows, and I would soon have my share of the gate money," he growled.

"But to take a place in the line of mere drudges, to sink down into the death in life of a hall room and a cheap boarding-house. Once planted there, I am there forever. And I have not a friend in the whole world!"

His mental harvest had only been one of husks, and he keenly felt the absence of any definite calling *pour accrocher*.

Suddenly his eye caught the gleam of a sunset upon a dozen drifting, glittering white sails on the river.

They all seemed to float on serenely, borne along upon the broad tide, with no visible man's hand to guide.

"I will drift a while," he murmured. "I have a few thousand dollars. Something will surely turn up. If it does not," he resolutely said, "then, I will turn it up myself."

"There are women here, too—women with hearts of flame, and who are to be won. I was a fool ever to go out to the frontier. Perhaps—"

And his mind reverted to a lucky college chum who had married a woman nearly two generations older than himself, but a well-preserved Madame "Midas."

"By Jove! anything is better than this beastly poverty," he mused. "Even that."

"This is no era for poor men. Poverty is the only crime nowadays."

His cynicism was broken off by the approach of two men, who rose to rejoin friends in the train as it dashed along toward the Bronx River.

As they came up the smoking-car, Vreeland easily recognized Fred Hathorn, the stroke of the college crew in which he had once won hard-fought honors for the orange.

There was no mistaking the easy luxury which exhaled from Mr. Fred Hathorn of the great firm of Hathorn and Potter, bankers and brokers of dingy Wall Street, a man who had already arrived!

The first crucial glance of rapid inspection was not lost on Vreeland, as Hathorn, in an easy way cried: "Hello, Hod Vreeland! What brings you over here?"

With a perfunctory politeness, Mr. James Potter halted and calmly acknowledged Hathorn's listless introduction.

The little blonde man-about-town, however, gazed longingly ahead at the car, where certain fair dames now awaited their escorts.

Jimmy Potter was born to "no end of easy money," and so his dashing senior partner's genius for finance was strongly buttressed by the whirlwind of cash which clustered around Jimmy Potter's lucky head.

All sorts of financial bees seemed to swarm around Potter and quietly settle in his hive.



"What's the use of making a row?" he often remarked. "Sit still, and what you want in life will come to you." Mr. James Potter of New York was an Epicurean disciple.

The blood mounted to Vreeland's forehead as he noted all the deprecating courtesy of Hathorn's welcome.

"Damn him! I'll give him a bit of a bluff," he quickly decided, under the inspiration of some bold, familiar spirit.

There was an air of quiet comfort in the careless response of Vreeland.

"I have just fallen into a good bit of money by my father's death, and so have come on here to enjoy myself. I may spend a couple of years abroad."

Vreeland then blessed that daring, familiar spirit which so saucily suggested his "cheeky" retort, as the man who had been his chum and fellow of several Greek letter societies stopped short. "Wait for me at the station, old fellow. We are bothered yet with some ladies. They leave at the station. Then we will dine later at the club and talk over old times a bit. You'll come, too, won't you, Potter?"

Jimmy Potter carelessly nodded an assent from sheer laziness, and then the two members of the *jeunesse dorée*, passed on into the boudoir car.

There was a twinkle of triumph in Vreeland's eye as he sank back in his seat.

"I got a dinner out of you at any rate, Mr. Snob," he gleefully chuckled.

And, highly elated, he decided then and there, to vary his first plan of drifting with the tide, and to cautiously put his oar in a bit where it would help him on.

His step was as light as the tread of a panther when he leaped out of the car at Forty-second Street.

"I'll have a stolen glance at their women," he quickly resolved. "Perhaps they may give dinners, too."

And just then, there seemed to be the twinkle of a little star of Hope lighting up that devious, unknown path which he was so soon to tread.

"I'll let him give me a Club card," he mused, as the wearied passengers hurried along to brave the din of importunate jehus.

He was wondering how much of a social show he could make at need with his slender fortune, when the two men slowly approached with three "shining ones" of the golden strata of womanly New York.

"These people are all in the swim," he murmured. "I will find the way! I am as good as any of them."

And as he raised his eyes, he met the glances of the imperial-looking woman who was Fred Hathorn's companion.

The lady's eyes rested for a moment upon the handsome stranger, and then fell with a peculiar abruptness.

"If that woman plays any star part in his life, I will try and take her away from him," resolved Vreeland, whose whole soul was now thrilling with the beautiful woman's sudden, startled admission of interest in a passing stranger. The wine of life stirred in the young wanderer's veins.

His audacious, familiar sprite suggested the profound bow which was Mr. Harold Vreeland's first salutation upon the outskirts of the "Four Hundred."

He had adroitly managed to convey the respectful homage of the salutation by his velvety eyes to the

very person intended, for, while Jimmy Potter was placidly listening to the brilliant chatter of two very vivacious rosebuds, Mrs. Elaine Willoughby turned to Hathorn:

"Fred, who is your Western friend?" she asked, with an assumed carelessness.

It was by sheer good luck that Hathorn, who was watching the young millionairess whom he was soon to marry, answered with an unusual warmth:

"An old college chum—Vreeland of Princeton, and a rattling good fellow."

Fred Hathorn eyed with a certain qualminess the easy *aplomb* of his Cræsus partner, as Jimmy Potter pressed closely to the side of Hathorn's destined bride, Miss Moneybags.

That young lady was destined to play the rôle of Queen of Diamonds in the ambitious young banker's life.

He had resolutely set up the motto, "*Aut Cæsar, aut nullus*," and he was just a bit shy of the beloved James trifling with his dashing fiancée.

"All sorts of things happen in New York," mused the agnostic Hathorn, as he handed the ladies into a waiting victoria and then turned to rejoin the man who more than ever had now decided to paddle a bit, as well as to drift on with the tide of fortune.

There was a glow of satisfaction burning in the Western adventurer's heart as, half an hour later, he noted Hathorn dash off his potent signature behind his guest's name on the visitor's book of the Old York Club. It was the *open sesame* to the regions of the blest—young New York *par excellence*.

The trio adjourned to the billiard room, and, then and there, Vreeland for the first time tasted the famous club cocktail.

He was "living up to his blue china," as he gravely bowed when Hathorn gave him a two-weeks' card.

"I'll have it renewed for you, old fellow," lightly remarked the young banker.

"Pity our waiting list is so long. We must try to get your name advanced, by hook or crook."

While Hathorn departed to give his personal orders for the dinner, Jimmy Potter drew apart to glance over a handful of cards, letters and *billets d'amour* which a grave old club steward had handed to him.

He critically selected two, the missives of "she who must be obeyed," and then carelessly slipped the fardel of the others into the oblivion of his breast pocket.

He sat there, the ferret-eyed young millionaire, glowering after Hathorn's retreating form. "Pity to see Alida VanSittart wasted on that cold human calculating machine! Fred is as indurated as a steel chisel."

The little child of Pactolus felt his tiny veins still tingling with the exhalant magnetism of the budding heiress whom Hathorn had selected as a second spoke in that wheel of fortune of which the unconscious Jimmy was the main stay.

The aforesaid young patrician, Miss Alida, was "divinely tall" and of a ravishing moonlight beauty, two elements of ensnaring witchery to the dapper, *blasè* young Midas, whose little patent leathers had pattered vainly along after the stride of that elastic young goddess.

The alert Vreeland grimly eyed the eager Jimmy Potter, and noted the tell-tale quiver of the youth's slim fingers as he fished out the two "star" leaders of his evening mail.

"I would like just one night with that chap at poker, with no limit," gravely mused Vreeland, with an inspirational sigh. "He looks soft."

While the *parvenu* "sized up" his man, he was aware of a hum of murmured comment at a table near him.

Two men were following with their envious eyes the tall form of the fortunate Hathorn—"the very rose and expectancy of the state," as he called his myrmidons around him.

"Lucky devil is Hathorn," quoth A. "Saw him get out of the train to-night with Mrs. Wharton Willoughby. Potter over there and a gang of girls have been up at Lakemere. He still holds her fast."

Quoth B: "He has a regular run of nigger luck. Elaine Willoughby is the Queen of the Street. Her account must be worth a cool hundred thousand a year to the firm. And here drops in to him, the whole VanSittart fortune, a cool ten millions."

Vreeland started as A rejoined moodily: "I had hoped that some other fellow might have a chance to make the running at Lakemere, now that Hathorn is *rangé*; but it really seems to be 'a *petit ménage à trois*' so far."

And B, thereat, enviously growled: "He ought to cling to the generous woman who made him. I always thought Hathorn would finally marry her. She trusts him with her chief account, the——— deals." Vreeland cursed the caution which cost him that one keyword "but, there's a mystery."

It was with a wolfish hunger for "more sweetness and light" that the unmoved Vreeland deftly arose and followed his host and Potter to a fair upper chamber of that narrow-chested corner club house on



Fifth Avenue in the thirties, at whose critic-infested windows both Miss Patricia and Miss Anonyma "give a side glance and look down."

The royal road to fortune which had led the ambitious Hathorn "on the heights" seemed to be clear of mist now to his hypocritical visitor.

Was there room for another chariot in the race? The familiar sprite was busy with daring suggestions.

If a rich woman—not of an age *très tendre*—had made one man, some other woman of that ilk might be waiting with a willing heart in the babel of Gotham for the shapely young Lochinvar come out o' the West.

The fires of hope leaped through his veins.

As they seated themselves to the enjoyment of that particular clear turtle soup which is justly the pride of the club *chêf*, both host and guest were adroitly playing at cross-purposes.

Hathorn, with a secret avidity entirely New Yorkish, determined to find out all the details of Vreeland's financial windfall.

He had a vague idea that the outlandish wilds of Montana were stuffed with copper mines, gold ledges, silver leads, cattle ranches, and "all sorts of things that might be gotten hold of," *i. e.*, other people's money.

And if this placid and lamb-like blonde guest had "dropped into a good thing," then by a judicious use of a regulated social hospitality, Hathorn now proposed to "drop into that same good thing."

An uneasy fever seems to burn in a New York man's blood from the moment when he knows his neighbor to have an unprotected penny.

The keen-eyed Vreeland minutely examined his

old chum's "get-up," and quickly decided that he would closely copy this easily graceful "glass of fashion and mould of form."

He had already resolved that he would also try to make a "run in" at Lakemere, if the cards came his way.

"I could always give Fred ten points at billiards and twenty with the women, and then do him every time," mused Vreeland. "He only plays a sure-thing game."

Vreeland's own motto had always been "*De l'audace! Toujours de l'audace!*" and in fact, the root of his quarrel with his own cowardly father had been the sniveling, self-deprecatory caution of that "Old-man-afraid-of-his-record."

The little dinner was "*très-soigné*," for Mr. Fred Hathorn did everything "decently and in order," and it calmly proceeded to the gastronomic delight of a pleasure-loving man who had long nibbled at jerked elk and biscuits *a la* Mike Muldoon.

The wines, with their soft suggestion and insinuating succession, soon led them up to the point where Fred felt that he "had his man about right."

The shame-faced Potter, with his mandatory billets from "She," burning under his waistcoat, soon mumbled several iron-clad excuses of unnecessary mendacity about "seeing a man," and then gladly escaped, hustling himself into the hack with all the fond expectancy of a man who bought quite unnecessary diamond necklaces loyally and cheerfully for that queen of bright eyes, Miss Dickie Doubleday of the Casino.

When the old college comrades were left alone, even the shaven servitor having fled, over the cigars



of the incomparable Bock & Co., the two young men drifted into a considerable *rapprochement*.

The old friendly days came back. Chateau Yquem, Pontet Canet, fine Burgundy, and Pommery Sec have often mended many a torn thread in the web of friendship, as well as patched up the little rift in the Lute of Love. Your sweet devil-born spirit of champagne always stands smiling at the crossroads of life.

“And, both reviewed the olden past—  
Full many a friend, in battle slain,  
And all the war that each had known,  
Rose o’er them once again.”

The dinner was a “howling success” from the varying points of view of each sly schemer and his would-be dupe.

Hathorn smiled knowingly when Vreeland carelessly remarked that he was not familiar with the dry details of Montana investments.

“I leave all that drudgery to my lawyers,” he airily remarked, with all the nerve of a Napoleon Ives.

“I must try and work his account in our direction,” mused the ardent devotee of business, while Vreeland gracefully bowed his thanks, when Hathorn rejoined:

“Mrs. Willoughby? Yes. A wonderful woman. Prettiest place at Irvington. She entertains a great deal. I’ll ask her if I may present you. She’s probably the heaviest operator on the Street of all our rich women.”

It was long after midnight when the two chums separated.

Their strange life orbits had intersected for the first time since they sang “Lauriger Horatius” together in an honest, youthful chorus.

Mr. Harold Vreeland now felt intuitively that his

"bluff" was a good one. He had always battled skillfully enough in the preliminary skirmishes of his conflict with the world, but he felt that the scene of action had been poorly chosen.

Hard-hearted and pitiless, he cursed the memory of his corrupt and inefficient father, as he directed his lonely steps to the "Waldorf," to register his name as a permanent guest.

His heart beat no throb warmer in acknowledgment of the seven thousand dollars' windfall which was to bring his star up from an obscure western declination to a brilliant eastern right ascension.

He delivered his luggage checks to the night clerk of New York's greatest hotel, and proudly inscribed himself as a member of the "swell mob" filling that painted Vanity Fair.

A strange fire burned within his veins. He recalled Fred Hathorn's final semi-confidential remark: "Do you know anything of handling stocks? If you do, we could put you up to a good thing or two on the Street now."

It was no lie. The glib story which had fallen easily from his lips of the six-months' exciting experience in which he acted as dummy cashier for a San Francisco kite-flying "Big Board" firm of brokers during a sporadic revival of the "Comstock craze."

He had learned then how to "wipe out a margin" as deftly as the veriest scamp who ever signed a fraudulent "statement" for reckless man or sly, insinuating woman.

He had artfully led Fred Hathorn on to describe the unique position of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby among the bravest of the swim. The New Yorker

was over-eager in his fencing, and so Vreeland easily gathered him in.

Lighting a cigar, he strolled along the silent Fifth Avenue, arranging with quick decision his preliminary maneuvers.

"This lovely woman who has built up Hathorn must surely have a vacancy in her heart at present, vice Hathorn, 'transferred for promotion' to head the VanSittart millions."

"It's a good play to come in between them now. He will never suspect my game, but I'll block his little scheme some way, unless he carries me along upward. He evidently wishes to be rid of the old *rapprochement* now, and yet not lose her stock business. By Jove! I would like to cut in there."

He strolled along toward the "Circassia," that pink pearl of all sumptuous apartment palaces, and eagerly reconnoitered the superb citadel of Elaine Willoughby's social fortifications.

"Lakemere, a dream of beauty," he murmured. "I'll soon get into that same gilded circle, and work the whole set for all they are worth."

He plumed himself upon the approving glance of the beautiful brown eyes of the mistress of Lakemere as she had swept by on Fred Hathorn's arm.

"She accepted my bow as an evident homage to her own queenly self," mused Vreeland, who was no dabster at reading the ways of the mutable woman heart.

"Yes, she is my first play. I must burn my ships and now go boldly in for 'High Life.' I'll risk it. Carlisle said: 'There are twenty millions of people in Britain—mostly fools.' Among the gilded fools of Gotham, some one easy mark must be waiting for me

on general principles. I'll take the chances and play the queen for my whole stack of chips."

He wandered homeward, after narrowly inspecting the "Circassia," and unconsciously attracting the attention of Daly, the Roundsman, the bravest and cheeriest member of the Tenderloin police.

Lights still gleamed from a splendid second-floor apartment above him, where a lovely woman, royal in her autumnal beauty, gazed out at the night.

Elaine Willoughby sighed as she turned away. "If I had told Hathorn all, he might have made me his wife. Alida—" Her face hardened as she choked down a sob. "My God! if I only knew! I must have Endicott renew his search."

In some strange way, the handsome Western stranger returned to haunt her disturbed mind. "He looks like a man brave, gallant, and tender," she sighed, as she forgot Hathorn, who, in his bachelor apartments was now musing upon the ways and means to hold Elaine Willoughby's heart after he had wedded Miss Millions.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE DRIFT OF A DAY IN NEW YORK CITY.

Sparkling lances of golden morning sunbeams broke and shivered on the fretted golden roof of the Synagogue by Central Park's eastern wall of living green.

New York was astir once more, and the daily burden of life settled down again upon myriads of galled shoulders. The rumbling trains had rattled away the blue-bearded mechanic, the pale-faced clerk, and the ferret-eyed anæmic shop girl to their daily "demnition grinds" long before Elaine Willoughby opened her eyes, in the Circassia.

"A breeze of morning moved," and down the Mall early pedestrians wandered, while the bridle bits rang out merrily on the park cantering paths.

Sedentary citizens had strolled along into the leafy shades for a peep at a cherished book, or a glance at the horrible of horrors in the "New York Whirl," while the recumbent tramp shook himself and hopefully scuttled forth from his grassy lair to search for vinous refreshment and to craftily elude the inexorable "sparrow cop."

New York City was awakened in the inverse order of rank, and the passion play of Gotham was on once more.

The splintered lances danced over the fragrant God's acres of the great pleasure ground to the palace on Central Park west, and as they were gaily reflected



from a silver-framed Venetian mirror, they recalled Mrs. Wharton Willoughby to that luxurious life of Gotham in whose fierce splendors there is no rest.

For as burning a flame throbs in the heated maelstrom of Manhattan as in any human eddy of the whole distracted globe.

The congestion of careworn faces had filled the town below Canal Street with its battling disciples of Mammon long before Mrs. Wharton Willoughby stepped into her brougham to seek the counsels of the one man on earth whose integrity was her rock of Gibraltar, Judge Hiram Endicott, her legal adviser and trustee.

For the silver-framed mirror had relentlessly reflected the traces left by the vigil of the night before.

It was the morning after the storm, and no calm had yet soothed the troubled soul of the woman whom thousands envied.

With a fine Gallic perception, Justine, the black-browed, slyest of French maids, had remarked: "*Madame n' a pas bien dormi?*" as she arranged the filmy coffee service of Dresden eggshell.

Elaine Willoughby was sullen, but resolute, as she arranged the details of her morning interview by the Ariel magic of her private telephone.

The ceaseless activity of the Street compelled the veiled "queen" to have her own "intelligence department" adjoining her boudoir, a nook with its special wires leading to Hiram Endicott's office and even to his sober Park Avenue home, and its talking wire also extended to the private office of Frederick Hathorn, Esq., of Hathorn and Potter, and another handy wire leading to the lair where the cashier of the

Chemical Bank scanned the ebb and flow of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby's fortune.

A stock ticker and dial telegraph, binding the central office of the Western Union to the Circassia, were always stumbling blocks to the insidious Justine, who earned a vicious golden wage in piping off every movement of the queen to the adroit Fred Hathorn.

On this particular morning, Hathorn was disturbed at heart as he answered Justine's spying warning of Mrs. Willoughby's early departure for her downtown coign of vantage—that room in Judge Endicott's offices in the Hanover Bank building, which was *terra incognita* even to him. The corner of Pine and Nassau was an Ehrenbreitstein.

For Hathorn's acutest schemes had never yet given him the open sesame to the room adjoining Hiram Endicott's study bearing the simple inscription "Office Willoughby Estate."

There, Madame Elaine was safe, even from him.

He grumbled: "I don't half like the way Elaine eyed Alida VanSittart yesterday. There was a storm signal in my lady's glances. If she should draw away her account—"

He shuddered, for he was well overdrawn in his personal relations with Mr. Jimmy Potter, who had just meekly slunk into his office, with quivering nerves and much pink-eyed indications of the aftermath of "a cosy little evening at Miss Dickie Double-day's."

"I must keep her well in hand till I pull off the marriage. Sugar is on the jump, too. There's a half million if I follow her sure lead.

"By God! I would give ten years of my life to know who posts her in that saccharine article of



prime necessity. I will give her something to interest her. Yes; the very thing! I'll run in Hod Vreeland there.

"He is a new face, and she may forget to harry Alida in the new man's initiation at Lakemere. And I'll go up and see her this afternoon myself."

When he had telephoned his carefully-worded message to Justine, to be delivered to Mrs. Willoughby on her return, he ordered a basket of orchids to precede his call at the Circassia, and then, with a fine after-thought, telegraphed "Mr. Harold Vreeland, Hotel Waldorf," to await his call on important business after dinner.

"If I am going to use Vreeland, I may as well put him into play right now," cheerfully mused Hathorn, as he lit a Prince of Wales cigarette.

"I can pay that devil Justine a bit extra to watch Hod Vreeland's little game with Elaine.

"A bit of healthy flirtation may cause her to forget Alida shining her down.

"Whirlwind speculator as she is, the Willoughby is one of Eve's family, after all. 'But yet a woman!' I wonder if—"

His reverie was cut off by the entrance of Mr. Jimmy Potter, who calmly remarked: "Sugar is going hellward! You had better get out and see about where we will land!"

Mr. Fred Hathorn had unwittingly passed one of the cross-roads of life and a knowledge of his proposed actions would have been Balm of Gilead to the anxious soul of Harold Vreeland, who was busily engaged with the great tailor, Bell—manufacturer of gentlemen *a la mode*.

The crafty Vreeland's heart would have bounded

had he realized how true was the debonnair Jimmy Potter's one golden maxim. "Hold on quietly, and what you want will come around to you!"

The arched doors of the Circassia, the superb gateways of Lakemere were being slowly swung for him, by the scheming man who cunningly proposed to divert the Montana bonanza into the coffers of Hathorn and Potter.

Mr. Potter, in his pink-eyed awakening from a night's folly, was now standing at the bar of the Savarin, gloomily reflecting upon certain rashnesses of his own on the preceding evening.

These little extravaganzas, greatly to the profit and delight of Miss Dickie Doubleday, had been all unsolicited by that sinewy-hearted young beauty.

"The biggest fool in the world is the man who fools himself!" sadly ejaculated Potter, as he shed his burden of care with the half dollar dropped for a "high ball."

He crept back to watch Fred Hathorn battling in the Sugar pit, with all the admiration of a faineant for an energetic man.

"Great fellow, Fred!" proudly reflected Mr. Jimmy, with one last wormwood pang for the robbery of that young Diana, Alida VanSittart.

"She outclasses him—ranks him—clean out of sight!" sadly mourned Potter. "Now, if I was only clear of the Doubleday, I might—"

But, an aching head cut short his half-formed determination.

"I suppose that she is like all the others!" sighed Potter.

"These New York girls' hearts are like a ball of string, unwind the thing—and—there's nothing left!"

Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, on her way down town, had stolen another glimpse at her own disturbed face. The *crise des nerfs* had clearly brought out to her the presaged passing of her beauty.

The little hand glass of the brougham told her, with brutal abruptness, that the face she was gravely studying must pale before the moonlight radiance of Alida VanSittart.

Face to face with her own sorrow, she saw the truth at last. Was it envy of the nymph-like girl or a dull hatred of Hathorn, for his cold ingratitude, which racked her heart?

"Perhaps, if I had told him all," she murmured, "I will find out the lost link of my life yet, and there must be a man somewhere who would prove worthy of a woman's whole confidence.

"One who could wander in le Jardin Secret, by my side!"

As she studied her own face, with a needless self-deprecation, there came back to her the handsome Western stranger.

"Perhaps," she dreamily said, as her mind wandered away to the great dim Sierras, "uplifting their minarets of snow," "he may have caught their majestic secret of truth and lofty freedom."

And—she, too, drifted on to a cross-road of life.

Elaine Willoughby had finished her inspection of the counterfeit presentment afforded by the little mirror.

Though matters of both head and heart claimed all the exercise of her mental powers on this morning, she was lost in a vexing comparison of her own personal charms with those of Alida VanSittart.

The lady had never fathomed the reason why the

wise Thales had formulated his priceless proverb of three words into the cramped diction, "Man! Know Thyself!"

The antique sage wisely refrained from saying, "Woman! Know Thyself!" for, far beyond the clouds wrapping the misty ruins of Greece, Rome and the Nile, the woman of yesterday never had been the woman of to-day, nor her chameleon substitute of to-morrow.

The only thing unvarying in womanhood, is its infinite emotional variety. Not one in a million of that charming sex has ever mastered the secret of their strange enigmas of varying loves, and the one only anchored feeling of motherhood.

The divine Shakespeare's words, "'Tis brief! Aye—as woman's love!" are supplemented by the great-hearted Mrs. Browning's feminine lines, "Yes! I answered you last night. No! this morning, sir, I say!"

Elaine Willoughby did not know herself. She resolutely put away the reason why she ignored all the hawk-eyed young Gibson beauties of Irvington, Tarrytown, and Ardsley, to nourish a resentment alone against that slim Diana, Alida VanSittart.

Woman of the world, throned upon a golden pedestal of wealth—mistress of secrets that would shake the financial world—she had also enjoyed the homage of men long enough to know every one of her own good points.

There had been hours of triumph, too. For, after all, a woman's heart beat behind the silken armor of her Worth robes.

Still in the bloom of a meridian beauty, no one in Gotham knew but Hiram Endicott that her years were thirty-seven.

Her brunette loveliness of face was accentuated by the molded symmetry of her Venus de Milo form.

Men knew her only as the childless widowed chate-laine of Lakemere, the inheritor of a vast fortune hazily dating from Colorado.

A few cold words from that oracle, Judge Hiram Endicott, had dispelled any doubts as to the authenticity of the late Wharton Willoughby.

The checks of the woman whom all had failed to win were considered among the cognoscenti as gilt-edged as Treasury Certificates.

The grave glances of her sole attorney and trustee were also a no thoroughfare to prying gossipers, and it was only by a long series of stealthy financial sleuth work that the financial world discovered both "sugar" and "oil" to be as granite buttresses to the unshaken pyramid of her solid wealth. On the Street she was a whirlwind operator—with "inside tips!"

As the brougham swung along through Pine Street, Mrs. Willoughby caught a single glimpse of Fred Hathorn, eager-eyed, and hurrying to the Stock Exchange.

The man of thirty-five had risen to be a clubman—a yachtsman of renown—a man of settled fortune—and a social lion, too, in the five years since she had opened the gates of her heart to admit the handsome struggling youth, then paddling feebly in Wall Street's foaming breakers.

She leaned back with a sigh. Hathorn's sudden apparition had opened her eyes to the reason of her dull hatred of the millionaire fiancée.

"He is the reason why I hate that girl," she murmured, with misty lashes, and an old saw came back to her.



"It is hard to look out on a lover's happiness through another man's eyes!"

In the gilded throng at Lakemere, the proprietary endearments of Frederick Hathorn had galled her stormy soul. She knew not that the *parvenu* broker was only publicly sealing, beyond a doubt, the projected union which would make him the equal in capitalistic reserve of that easy-going Son of Fortune, Potter, to whom all things came around—even Miss Dickie Doubleday's bills.

A ray of light lit up her darkened heart.

"Alida is innocent of wrecking my happiness. She could know nothing. For I have been silent! And if I held the ladder, can I blame him for climbing? He needs me no longer.

"I have been only a means to an end. Alida will be the last. And then, Frederick Hathorn, Esquire, is safely in the swim!"

A sudden conviction of the uselessness of her affection of a semi-maternal interest in the fortunes of the hardened man of thirty-five told her that she had left all the doors open to him.

For there was that in her own life, dating back to her girlhood, which she had never even revealed to her half-lover protégé.

With her rich womanly nature sorely shaken, her tender dark eyes drooping, she now owned to the hope, now fled forever, that Hathorn would light the beacon of love in her lonely heart. "I have not trusted him," she murmured. "He owes me nothing, nothing but gratitude."

Too late, she saw that mere gratitude does not kindle into love, and a sense of her own lack of frankness sealed her accusing lips.



"I can not blame Hathorn!" she murmured. "It is my own fault. I told him the truth, but—not the whole truth!"

Still, she suffered from the shattering of flattering hopes long secretly cherished, and saw now the marriage of her financial *élève* as a future bar to the confidential relations which had linked him to her fortunes with golden chains.

"They will go on and play the game of life brilliantly without me—these two, whom I have unwittingly brought together. I will go on alone—now—to the end—unless I can find the lost thread.

"Endicott must reopen the search! I will spend a half million—and—that other heart shall know mine!" She was lost in the memories of a buried past.

As she entered the vestibule of the office building, a grave manly voice aroused her.

"I thought that you should know this," whispered Hugh Conyers, of the New York *Clarion*. "It has just come over the wires from Washington.

"I was going up to tell the Judge, and have him send for you. You will have a busy day."

The startled woman read a slip which was the burden of the lightning Ariel which had set "Sugar soaring hellward" in the classic diction of James Potter, Esq.

"Hugh!" gasped the Queen of the Street, as she drew him into a dark corner, "can I never reward you for your loyalty? Is there nothing I can do for you?"

The Knight of the Pen laughed gaily, as he pocketed the yellow slip. "Not now! Lady Mine! You paid in advance when you saved Sara's life by sending her away to Algiers! I'm off to the office. When you

can give two respectably poor people an evening, send for us, that's all—but, we want you all to ourselves!

"If there is anything more, I will come around. Shall I tell this to Hathorn?" His eyes were fixed eagerly upon her.

There was a slight ring of hardness in her voice, as she hastily said:

"Not a word to him, in future. He is going to marry—and—go away for a time. I will handle this line alone—after this—only report to the Judge. He is my Rock of Gibraltar."

She disappeared in the elevator with a hard little laugh. For she was trying to make light of the blow which had told upon her lonely heart.

The newspaper man edged his way up Nassau Street in a brown study.

"Coming events cast their shadows before," he muttered. "I wonder if she will ever know? Some day, perhaps."

Darting messenger boys and disgruntled pedestrians eyed wrathfully the high-browed man of forty, who strode along with his gray eyes fixed on vacancy.

One or two "business women" noted the clean-cut, soldierly features, the well-shaped head, with all the intellectual stamp of old Amherst, brightened by the fierce intellectual rivalry of the nervous New York press.

Artist, athlete, and thinker, Hugh Conyers had hewed his upward way through the press of bread winners out into the open, and, still sweet-hearted and sincere, he steadily eyed without truckling, New York's golden luxury, and saw, with a living sympathy, the pathetic tragedies of the side eddies of Gotham's stiller waters

From his cheery den, where his sister Sara Conyers' flowers of art bloomed, the writer looked out unmoved upon the Walpurgis nights of winter society—the mad battles of Wall Street—and the shabby abandon of New York City's go-as-you-please summer life.

It was only in his faraway summer camp, by the cheery fire, under the friendly stars, or out on the dreaming northern lakes, floating in his beloved birch canoe, that he opened his proud heart to nature—and then, perchance, murmured in his sleep—a name which had haunted his slumbers long.

“So! It's all over between them!” mused Hugh, as he was swallowed up in a lair of clanking presses and toiling penmen. “Mr. Fred Hathorn has arrived. God help his wife to be! The Belgian granite paving block is as tender as that golden youth's heart.”

He well knew that the artful protégé had only used the generous woman's volunteered bounty of the past —“as means to an end.”

“Elaine has simply coined her golden heart for that smart cad!” he sighed, as he grasped a blunted spear of a pencil to dash off an editorial upon “German Influence in the South Seas.”

In her guarded downtown office, Mrs. Elaine Willoughby resolutely put aside the one subject now nearest her heart, to summon, by signal, the fortunate man who was fast slipping out of her life.

The startled Queen of the Street gave but ten minutes' time to the consideration of the sudden change in the affairs of a giant syndicate which used two hundred millions of dollars in swaying the world of commercial slaves at its feet.

A warning word from Hiram Endicott's nephew

(his sole confidant) told her that her lawyer-trustee had just been summoned, privately, to meet the inscrutable Chief of the Syndicate.

With keen acumen, she reviewed the hostile probing of a mighty Senate, into the Sealed Book of the great Trust's affairs.

From her own safe, she then extracted a memorandum book and grimly smiled, as she noted a date—May 17, 1884.

She quickly read over two cipher letters, dated "Arlington Hotel, Washington, D. C.," which had been silently handed her by Endicott's only relative, and murmured, "Can it be that the Standard Oil people are going to quietly buy in and wager their vast fortunes on the double event?"

"Hiram will know—and—what he knows we will keep to ourselves!"

A sense of absolute safety possessed her when she reflected that the sole depository of her life secrets—the one man *au courant* with her giant speculations was a childless widower and had passed the age when passions' fires glow—and was, moreover, rich beyond all need of future acquisition.

Pride kept Hiram Endicott still in the ranks of his profession, while the acquired taste of money-making filled up the long days darkened by the loss of wife and daughter.

When Hathorn, replying to her summons with an anxious brow, entered the room where the beautiful architect of his fortunes awaited him, he found a strange serenity brooding upon her face.

With a brief greeting, he plunged in *media res*. His report was quickly made.

The unmoved listener quietly remarked, "Hold my

account out of all future deals in Sugar. Do nothing whatever. I may go away for a few weeks. I do not care for this little flurry. I will stand out—and—the Judge will keep that line safe.”

The quiet decision of Elaine Willoughby's orders gave the quietus to the young man's eager plans for a great coup.

Watching her craftily from the corners of his eyes, he lightly turned to the proposed visit of that interesting Montana capitalist, Harold Vreeland.

“Bring him to see me, by all means!” the Lady of Lakemere cordially said. “He seems to have caught a bit of the breeziness of the pines.”

And then, when Hiram Endicott briskly entered, Mr. Frederick Hathorn fled away to the renewed struggles of the Exchange.

The quondam “only broker” was, however, not deceived. He raced on through the excited street to cover the firm's large line of the rapidly advancing stock, and reasoned quickly as he went.

In his heart there was the conviction of a coming change in the generous heart which had been so long open to him.

“Elaine is a deep one,” he wrathfully mused. “She is either flying too high for me to follow in this—or else, she is ‘moving in a mysterious way her wonders to perform.’”

He knew her nature too well to question her explicit orders.

The nerve of a duelist, the honor of a caballero, the courage of a plumed knight—all these were her attributes, and he was not mad enough to doubt that she knew her own mind.

The “moaning of the sea of change” oppressed him.



"She has got out beyond me," he grumbled, and then, with all the experience born of his social life "above board" and "under the rose," he failed to remember any case wherein a loving woman had gone madly wild in approval of a man's devotion to another daughter of Eve.

"I was a fool to take Alida up there to Lakemere, and fret my best customer with the 'billing and cooing' act! It was a bad play—and—yet, the break had to come!"

He swore a deep oath that he would, when married, hold Alida VanSittart well in hand, and still cling to the desirable business of the woman who had made his fortune.

"Here's Vreeland," he hopefully planned. "Just the fellow! Ardent, young, an interesting devil, and, rich. He will help to fill up the measure of her lonely days—and, his game can never cross my own.

"He's a mighty presentable fellow, too, and I can perhaps strengthen my hold on her through him."

A cautionary resolve to keep the handsome Western traveler away from Miss Alida VanSittart was born of the slight uneasiness caused by the gilded Potter's attentions to the tall young nymph of the court of Cræsus. "She is my '*sine qua!*'" he smiled. "No fooling around there!"

It was four o'clock before the busy Hathorn could get the nose of his financial bark steered safely over the saccharine breakers of the Sugar market.

And, still, a growing excitement filled the aspiring young banker's veins.

While he had struggled on the floor of the Exchange, he was suddenly smitten with a fear that his patroness had abruptly abandoned him.



He sent a confidential lad over to watch Judge Endicott's office, and he was soon rewarded with the reliable news that the serene goddess of Pactolus had calmly driven away after an hour's stay at her trustee's office.

"What is she up to?" he fretted. "I'll find out if she really goes home!" he then decided, with a growing uneasiness, as he marked the surging tide of Sugar speculation.

He was fortunate enough to attract the personal attention of Harold Vreeland, of Montana, for that new member of the *jeunesse dorée* was held socially in eclipse, until Bell's minions should purvey the "robes of price" suited to the swelling port assumed by the bold social gambler.

The hearty assent of the fancied dupe to the evening call, enabled Hathorn to call his patroness by the private wire at the Circassia.

"By Jove! She is lucky to be out of this flurry!" he decided, when Mrs. Willoughby's voice closed the telephonic interview without even a passing reference to "the market." "She did go home after all!"

And, so lulled to security, he remembered all the vastness of her varied moneyed interests. He knew only the magnitude of her transactions in the past.

The hidden reasons of her Napoleonic moves he had never penetrated, and he had vainly shadowed her visits to Washington and sifted the guests at her summer palace. But now, his future control was endangered.

The crowd of guests, would-be suitors, financial and political friends hovering around her, embraced judges, generals, senators, governors, national statesmen, and party leaders.

Every social door was open to the mistress of Lake-mere—and her smile, like the sunshine, beamed impartially upon all. So, the veiled espionage of the past had been fruitless.

The paid revelations of Justine had so far only rewarded him with the recurring details of the suing of many sighing gallants kneeling before her guarded golden shrine.

In the first months of the cementing of their past friendship, he had even dared to dream of a personal conquest, but the high-minded frankness of her kindness had soon killed that youthful conceit.

And now, to-day, he felt that the golden chain had snapped beyond him, and that he really had never fathomed the inner nature of the queenly woman.

But one unreserved intimacy characterized her guarded life. The union of interest between herself and Hiram Endicott.

Hard-hearted and mean-spirited, Hathorn clung for a year to the idea that the wealthy lawyer was perhaps the Numa Pompilius of this blooming woman whose roses of life were yet fragrant with summer's incense.

But the vastness of her transactions, and even the results of his mean spying, left him, at last, absolutely persuaded that they were not tied by any personal bond.

The "man who had arrived" lacked the delicacy of soul to know that the prize might have been his, had he been true to the ideal which Elaine Willoughby had formed of him. For, he had never been frank-hearted enough to risk her refusal.

He had never forgotten the night, years ago, when he had boldly avowed to her that he had not a real

friend in the world. It had been with only a coarse joy in his coming good fortune, that he had listened to her answer, "You must come to me again."

That night, five years before, Elaine Willoughby had whispered to her own blushing face in her mirror, "I can make a social power of him. I can build up his fortunes. Men shall know and honor him—and then—"

She had never completed that sentence, framing a wish that she dared not name in words.

But he had at last coldly passed her by, and knelt before the feet of a mere girl, who valued him only for what the silent benefactress had made him. It was a cruel stroke.

"She is different from all the other women I have ever met!" ruefully sighed Hathorn, who now saw that the great Sugar intrigues were sealed from his future ken. He had watched the artful juggling of government bonds finally make a daring and aspiring New York banker rise to be a rival of the Rothschilds. He knew, by gossipy chatter, of the American Sugar Company's alleged veiled participation in the great New York campaign of 1892.

He saw the Sugar Trust moving on to a reported influence in national affairs, and, keenly watching every lucky stroke of the Queen of the Street, he was persuaded that the finest threads of the vast intrigue in some hidden way ran through her slender jeweled hands. He saw his fault too late.

"I might have known all—if I had married her!" he decided, as he hid his disturbed countenance in a coupé on his way uptown.

He was conscious of that slight chill of change

which is an unerring indication of a woman's secret resolve.

But a last brilliant thought came to the puzzled trickster. It seemed a golden inspiration.

"Here is Vreeland, heart-free and foot-loose. I can exploit him and get him into the best houses in a month. He is not a marrying man.

"If I can work him into our stock business, I may regain her—through him—and I'll keep Alida out of her sight. She may fancy him. I'll post Vreeland, and, perhaps, he may find the key to her hold on the Sugar deals.

"With Justine in my pay, and Vreeland well coached, I may yet fathom the inner arcanum of the great impending deal.

"A union of the Sugar Trust and the Standard Oil interests would make the heaviest financial battery of modern times—and—by Jove—they would be able to swing Uncle Sam's policy at will. Yes! I will push Vreeland to the front."

With a hopeful glance at a sober banking structure, not far from the corner of Wall and Broad, the day-dreamer murmured, "I might even rise like him," as he caught sight of a gray-mustached man, now supposed to be comfortably staggering along under the weight of a hundred brilliantly won millions.

"I have Alida VanSittart's money—as an anchor. I will use this Vreeland as my tool. He's an open-hearted fellow."

Hiram Endicott, at the corner, watched the young banker dash by. The old lawyer's thin form was still erect at sixty-five. His stern cameo face, and steady frosty eye, comported with his silken white hair.

He strode on, with the composed manner of an old

French marquis. His heart was wrung with the passionate appeal of Elaine Willoughby to reopen an unavailing search of years. For she bore, in silence, a secret burden.

The morning had been given to the calm discussion of new means to unlock a mystery of the past, "to pluck out a rooted sorrow."

Endicott's nephew was now in sole charge of the giant battle with loaded dice, in the ring of Sugar speculation. The lawyer alone knew that Hathorn's sceptre had departed from him. He cursed the retreating gallant.

"Can it be that the marriage of this cold-hearted young trickster has opened her eyes to the folly of educating a husband, *in posse*?"

"Or—is it the shadow of the old sorrow, Banquo-like, returning? God bless her. I fear it is a hopeless quest."

And yet, with all the fond dissimulation of Eve's family, Elaine Willoughby was serenely radiant that night as the cautious Hathorn led the "open-hearted fellow" into the splendors of the Circassia. "This plan of mine will work," mused Hathorn, who did not see the gleam of triumph in Vreeland's eyes when the hostess asked him to visit her dreamy domain of Lakemere.



## CHAPTER III.

## A FRANK DISCLOSURE.

Hathorn returned, thoroughly hoodwinked, from the introductory evening spent at the Circassia. It had seemed strange to him that a leading general of the regular army, and a dapper French author, then in the brief blaze of his "lionship," with a grave senator and a returned Polar explorer should have been called to meet together at the dinner table. "It's Elaine's incomparable way of making a delightful *olla podrida* of the social menu," he mused, as he watched the hostess narrowly. "*Caviare* to the General!"

When he had found time to whisper a confidential word as to the enormous Sugar sales of the day, the Lady of Lakemere only laughed merrily. "I have now a soul above Sugar! I shall put my 'Trust' elsewhere!" And then, in her serious way, she slowly said: "Wait here with your Western friend, till all these other people go!" And he, with a budding hope, eagerly awaited her pleasure as of old.

Elaine's unruffled brow bore no business shades when she drew Hathorn aside for a moment into her boudoir, leaving the luxury-loving Vreeland wandering around spell-bound in a frank admiration of the queen's jewel-box. For so, the spacious apartment was termed in the circle of "le Petit Trianon."

"This is only my catch-all, Mr. Vreeland," cried Elaine, as she swept past him. "You must see Lakemere. There you can linger—and—admire."



Harold Vreeland's silent oath of obedience followed the woman, who fixed her sweetly serious eyes on the agitated Hathorn, in the well-remembered room where their hearts had so often throbbed with quickened beats. "Was it to be a *rapprochement*?"

"It is only fair to tell you, Fred," she simply said, "that I shall have to avoid all excitements this summer. Doctor Hugo Alberg is not at all satisfied with my heart action. And, a tranquil rest at Lakemere is his sole prescription. Now, as I shall probably stay there till October first, I shall leave my speculative stock account to be handled by Judge Endicott, who has my sole power of attorney."

The mystified broker stood aghast at losing his pet account for such a long period. Was she leaving the Street forever? He faltered, "And this means—"

"That you must hasten your marriage. There are other things in life beside making money. Of course, I have confided only in you. Potter can not trust himself—and so, I can not trust him with the secrets of any of my financial movements. You are the one young Napoleon of your firm.

"So, if you really wish to go abroad, then make Alida a June bride. I shall avoid touching the Street till late in October—and then, when your European tour is over, I shall be able to take up the game of pitch and toss again."

He was conscious that she was keenly watching him. "Of course," he slowly said, "it gives me all the time I want. I was really concerned about your interests. It is a good plan, and I may be able to get Vreeland to play amateur banker in my place for a few months. Potter and he seem to fancy each other. I'll talk to Alida. This will probably suit her

wishes." It all looked fair enough, and yet—his bosom was filled with a vague alarm.

"I have already selected my present, Fred," merrily said the Queen of the Street. "Take time by the forelock, and give up these lovely summer months to young love." The broker's eyes were gleaming as he said, "Can it be possible that you have gone out of Sugar on the eve of a ten per cent surplus dividend? I heard that inside rumor to-day. You know how dear to me all your interests are."

He now felt that there was that behind the arras which was skillfully veiled from him. For her eyes were shining coldly over the smiling lips.

The dark-eyed woman simply said, "Tempt me not. I have promised Doctor Alberg to refrain.

"So, go and make yourself Benedick, the married man. It is the time of roses—you must pluck them as you pass. Come to me—when you have settled this matter. I will give you a social send-off at Lakemere worthy of 'the high contracting parties.'"

Her voice was thrilling him now as of old, and yet, with all her kindness, he instinctively felt that something was going out of his life forever.

"It will be always the same between us, Elaine," the young Napoleon murmured. She had risen and turned toward the door.

"Did you ever know me to change?" she softly said, as she glided out to begin a cordial *tête-a-tête* with Vreeland. There was no further intimate exchange of thoughts possible between the secretly estranged couple, and, now keenly on guard, in a disturbed state of mind, Mr. Frederick Hathorn lingered in converse late that night at the Old York Club, with his quondam friend.

Harold Vreeland's conduct at his debut had been perfectly adapted to Elaine Willoughby's changeful mood. The deep courtesy of a perfect self-effacement, and his coldly-designed waiting policy soothed her strangely restless heart.

The woman who once could have married Hathorn was now feverishly eager to see him haled to the bar of matrimony.

"Once that he is *rangé*—I am then sure of myself again," she murmured, as she saw her perfectly composed face for the last time that night in the silver-framed mirror. And yet, she knew that it was but a social mask. There was an anticipatory revenge, however, in the fact that Hiram Endicott had reported the private pooling of her enormous Sugar holdings with those of the great chief of the vast Syndicate.

The ten per cent bonus dividend, long artfully held back, was her assured profit now, and Hugh Conyer's watchful loyalty had made "assurance doubly sure."

Endicott had already sent out a dozen agents to take up once more the secret quest which had so often failed them—and these "legal affairs" naturally gave him the excuse for a tri-weekly visit to Lakemere.

"So, Mr. Frederick Hathorn, as you have locked the door of my heart on the outside, you may now throw away the useless key!" she mused "I will find my best defense against any weakness in the keen-witted young wife who will surely show you yet the thorns on the rosebud."

Dreams of the past mingled with the shapes of the present, as the lady of Lakemere laid her shapely head to rest.

"He has irreproachable manners, at least," was her last thought, as the unconscious psychology of

mighty Nature brought the graceful Vreeland back to her mind. "I wonder if he is at heart like—the other?"

And so, all ignorant of the power of this self-confessed womanly yearning toward the handsome young stranger, Elaine Willoughby fell asleep, to dream of the crafty man who had not yet forgotten how her liquid eyes had dropped under his ardent gaze.

The laws of nature are the only inviolable code of life, and blindly the lady of Lakemere had passed on, all unwittingly, toward a turning point in her lonely life. Her barrier of pride only fenced out the ungrateful Hathorn, condemned for ingratitude.

Vreeland, following carefully upon Fred Hathorn's curvilinear conversational path, easily divined the uncertainty of the greedy young broker's mind.

"He wants Miss Millions, and yet, he would not lose his fairy godmother," thought the crafty adventurer. "I shall go slow and let them make the game.

"But wait till I am the guiding spirit of Lakemere. She shall come forward inch by inch, and he shall unfold to me every weak spot in his armor."

They had finished a grilled bone and a "bottle" before Hathorn foxily sought to draw out his friend as to the details of the Montana bonanza. The plan of an amateur four-months' Wall Street experience was quietly and deftly brought in.

"You see, Hod," frankly said Hathorn, "Jimmy Potter drinks occasionally. He has that pretty devil, Dickie Doubleday, on the string, and he plays high. Now, my lawyer alone has my Power of Attorney. I can post our confidential man.

"But, if you would open a special account of, say, a hundred thousand dollars, why, there is Sugar! There

will soon be a ten per cent bonus dividend. You could see the Street, *on the inside!* I know that you would get along with Potter.

"You always were a cool chap. What do you say? I shall marry Alida VanSittart, and take the run over the water while I can. I don't care, however, to lose Mrs. Willoughby. She is the heaviest woman operator in America. Her account is a young fortune to us. Think this over."

The fine "poker nerve" of Mr. Harold Vreeland was now manifest in his quick perception of Hathorn's trembling fingers. The smoke curled lazily from Vreeland's Henry Clay as he said: "I will open my heart to you, Fred. All my money is already well invested. And I do not care to move a small block of my funds. Besides—

"I have been cut off from all phases of womanhood save the 'Calamity Jane' type, or some one's runaway wife, for long years. I shall hurry slowly. You know the Arabic proverb: 'Hurry is the devil's.' Now, by October the first, I will have had my summer fling. I will perhaps join you then, if you can make the showing that I would like. But, just now, I am going in for the 'roses and raptures.'"

"You are not a marrying man, Hod?" cried Hathorn, in a sudden alarm.

"Heavens, no!" laughed the Western man. "Omar Khayam's vision of the 'Flower Garden' pales before the '*embarras de richesse*' of the New York 'Beauty Show.' I am as yet a free lance, and also, an old campaigner. I will solemnly promise not to marry till I see you again. But I'll stand up with you and see you spliced."

The compact was sealed over 'tother bottle, and



then Hathorn departed in high hopes. "He will drift easily into our circle," mused the sly broker, who, watching only his own loosening hold on Elaine Willoughby, jumped to the conclusion that Vreeland really controlled a vast fortune.

His friend had "called the turn" correctly.

"Bluff goes, it seems, even in cold-hearted New York," gaily concluded Vreeland, as he sauntered back alone to the Waldorf. "This strangely hastened wedding will bring me at once into the best circles. Mr. Fred Hathorn's groomsman is a social somebody. The Lakemere divinity will soon do the rest, and by the time you return, my sly friend, I will be ready to kick the ladder down on your side." He roared with a secret glee over his own "inability to disturb his invested funds."

With a vulpine watchfulness, he noted all Mr. Jimmy Potter's weak points. "I must get up my poker practice," he smilingly said, as he laid his comely head down to rest.

"'Mr. Potter of New York' shall reinforce that slender seven thousand dollars, or else I'm a duffer. He will never squeal, at least, not to his partner. And so I'll go in as a wedge between this ass and this fine woman who has unconsciously loved him. Yes, it's a good opening for a young man! A mean and easy betrayal!"

The preoccupations of the splendid wedding of Miss Alida VanSittart gave Vreeland, now "the observed of all observers," an ample opportunity to begin that "silent slavery" of a respectful devotion upon which he had decided as his safest *rôle* at Lakemere.

His days were pleasantly passed in gaining a growing intimacy with the club circles to which two



powerful influences had now gained him an easy access. For, Elaine Willoughby was drifting under the charm of his apparent self-surrender to her generous leadership—another handsome protégé.

His rising social star was fixed in its orbit by the honors of groomsman, and in the *visites de cérémonie*, the rehearsals, and all the petty elegancies of the "great social event," Mr. Harold Vreeland showed a perfectly good form. There was a gentle gravity in his Waldorf life which impressed even the *flâneurs* of that gilded hostlery. "There, sir," remarked an old habitue, "is a man who holds himself at his proper value."

Measured and fastidious in all his ways, Mr. Vreeland neglected no trifling detail, and he calmly went onward and upward. He well knew that, for some as yet hidden reason, the bridegroom was assiduously forcing his old chum forward into the glittering ring of America's Vanity Fair. And it exactly suited his own quiet game.

He fully appreciated the extensive influence of the Lady of Lakemere, for her friends, moved on deftly by her, now came forward to open the golden gates for him on every side.

Even before the wedding, Vreeland had made himself familiar with all the glories of Lakemere. Side by side with its beautiful mistress, he had threaded its leafy alleys, climbed its sculptured heights "when jocund morn sat on the misty mountain tops," and gloated secretly upon the splendid treasures of that perfect establishment. "This shall be mine yet," he swore in his delighted heart.

Out upon the moonlit lake, speeding along in a fairy launch, Mr. Harold Vreeland followed up his policy

of self-abnegation. "Do you not know that I can trace your noble kindness everywhere?" he murmured.

"I am all alone in the world. Your veiled influence is making cold-hearted New York smile as a blossoming paradise for me. No; do not deny it. You are the very loveliest Queen of Friendship." The beautiful brown eyes dropped before his eager gaze. She was a woman still.

Elaine Willoughby marked him as he went away with a growing interest. "Graceful, grateful, manly, and sincere!" was her verdict, easily reached, but one, however, not so enthusiastically adopted by either Judge Hiram Endicott or the Conyers couple, whom the Lady of Lakemere had captured for a visit before sending them away to the delightful summer exile of her Adirondack cottage.

"I don't know what that fellow is after, Hugh?" growled the old Judge one day, as they were returning to town together; "but, he looks to me like a fellow who would finally get it."

Conyers uneasily said: "He is the 'head pandrum' of this Hathorn wedding—old college chum and all that."

"*Arcades ambo!*" shortly said the silver-haired lawyer. "Mrs. Willoughby has a foolish fondness for picking up these Admirable Crichtons, and then forcing them along the road to fortune. It is only a generous woman's weakness, a sort of self-flattery."

"Vreeland is immensely rich—a man of leisure. Has jumped into one or two of the best clubs by mysterious backing, and seems to be all right," slowly answered Hugh, mentally contrasting his own plain tweeds with Vreeland's raiment of great price.

"I don't believe a word of it," sharply said Endicott.

"Oblige me and just keep an eye on him—*about her*, I mean," and the journalist was fain to give the required promise.

Their hands met in a silent pledge of loyalty to the lonely-hearted mistress of Lakemere.

The elder man alone knew the silent sorrows of her anxious soul. He alone knew of the quest of long years—a labor of love, so far fruitless.

The younger guarded his own heart secret in his honest breast, and yet, while hiding it from the world, he wondered why some man worthy of her royal nature had not taken her to wife.

As the train swept along, watching a "bright, particular star" mirrored in the flowing Hudson, Conyers sighed, "God bless her! She's as far above me as that star, and yet, she makes my life bright."

It was Mr. Harold Vreeland who later carried off all the honors of the sumptuous wedding as a proper "man-at-arms" in Cupid's army. He was secretly approved by even the *raffinée* bridesmaids. He was also the diplomatic messenger who delivered to Mrs. Alida Hathorn that superb diamond necklace which was Elaine Willoughby's bridal offering. Hathorn remembered after the ceremony how strangely stately were his lovely patroness' congratulations to the radiant bride.

Vreeland's speech at the Lakemere dinner was classic in its diction, and when the festivities slowly crystallized into iridescent memories, and the "happy pair" were half over to that "bourne" from whence many American travelers do not return—gay, glittering Paris—Mr. Harold Vreeland was soon besieged with many sweetly insidious invitations to Lenox, Bar Harbor, Narragansett Pier, Newport, the

Hudson colony, and many other Capuan bowers of dalliance.

Larchmont, Lakewood, Irvington, and other summer mazes opened their hospitable golden gates to him, and a swarm of biddings to polo, golf, lawn tennis, and other youthful circles, were gladly offered by man and maid. In other words, Vreeland was launched "in the swim."

In the hurried moments of the steamer parting, Vreeland would only vouchsafe a cool but diplomatic answer to Hathorn's final pleadings.

"I will meet and answer you on October 1st, but I'll look in on Potter a bit."

He did cordially agree to give the bridegroom a friendly report of all the doings at Lakemere, and he had fallen heir to Hathorn's intimacy with Justine—that spirited French maid, whose many life episodes had only deprived her of a shadowy candidacy for the honors of "*la Rosière*." "I trust to you to look after my interests, Hod, in a general way," eagerly said the bridegroom.

"So I will," heartily replied the young Lochinvar *à la mode*, and then he mentally added: "After my own are safe." And, so bride and groom sailed away on the ocean of a newer life.

He so far kept his promise, mindful of the gap already made by a dash into high life in his seven thousand dollars, as to closely cement an intimacy with Potter, begun over the "painted beauties."

Mrs. Hathorn's bridal wreath had hardly withered before the astute Vreeland, a good listener, had become the chief adviser of Potter in his doubtful warfare with that bright-eyed Cossack of Love, Miss Dickie Doubleday.

"Mr. Jimmy" now seriously contemplated a two years' visit to Europe on the return of the successfully married Hathorn. "The little rift within the lute" was widening. Miss Doubleday was as exacting as she was charming, and even "rosy fetters of ethereal lightness" were galling to the spoiled child of fortune. Potter had secretly purchased a Gazetteer and had made some furtive studies as to Askabad, Astrachan, Khiva, Timbuctoo, Khartoum, and several other places where his golden-haired tyrant could not follow him without due premonition. He contemplated a "change of base."

"I hope you will come in with us, Vreeland," cordially remarked Potter. "Hathorn tells me that you are well up in stocks and as quick as lightning. I wouldn't mind helping you to an interest. I must escape this—this—"

The puzzled little millionaire paused, for the first word was a misfit, and he was a good devil at heart. He could not abuse the tantalizing Miss Dickie Doubleday.

With a fine discrimination, the rising social star was touched with one pang of regret at the little man's agony, now impaled on the hook of Miss Dickie Doubleday's angle. He visited that bright-eyed young Ithuriel, and soon effected a "*modus vivendi*" which enabled Potter to cruise around on his yacht for one month of blessed and un hoped for peace.

In several sittings upon the "Nixie," Mr. Harold Vreeland relieved his grateful host of some fourteen thousand dollars, by the application of the neat little Western device known as "the traveling aces."

But, James Potter, grateful to the core, and lulled



by the insidious Pommery, never "caught on," and cheerfully "cashed up" without a murmur.

From this victorious encounter, Mr. Harold Vreeland gaily returned to Lakemere, after a brief tour of inspection of the seaside resorts sacred to the *gente fina*. He found everything "grist to his mill." The gates were widely ajar.

With the patient assiduity of a well-conceived purpose, he now began to make the most of this "one summer."

He was well aware, from the reports of the complacent Justine, that the Conyers were both out of the way, and his heart bounded with delight as he realized that Elaine Willoughby gracefully called him to her side on those four days of the week when Hiram Endicott was not in commune with her, in the splendid gray stone mansion bowered in its nodding trees.

He always paid her the delicate compliment of an implicit obedience, and in all the days of absence found the way made smooth for him elsewhere.

The circle at Lakemere was a large one, and Mr. Harold Vreeland, "with an equal splendor" and a touch "impartially tender," became the favorite *ami de maison*. He failed not, however, to spread the balm of his cordial suavity on every side.

Day after day drifted happily by, the unspoken pact between the new friends becoming a stronger bond with every week, and the watchful vigilance of the young adventurer was never relaxed.

He was now grounded on society's shores as a fixture, and apparently serenely unconscious, soon became the *vogue* without effort. The useless accomplishments of his college days now all came back to vastly aid the agreeable *parvenu*.



He had early mastered the secret of womanhood—the vague dislike possessed by all of Eve's charming daughters for the strong-souled and unyielding superior man. For, be they never so wary, "trifles light as air" happily fill up the days of those women to whom American luxury is both enfeebling and jading. The strong man is not needed in the feather-ball game of high life.

That one rare art of the woman-catcher, "never to bring up, in the faintest degree, the affairs of another woman," victoriously carried Vreeland on into the vacant halls of the *filles de marbre*. And so, "Mr. Harold Vreeland" was universally voted "a charming man of vast culture and rare accomplishments."

Fortunately, Mr. Fred Hathorn had widely trumpeted abroad the Montana bonanza, and the vulgar slaving over an easily assumed wealth carried him on both fast and far.

In his own heart, one carefully crystallized plan had already matured. To reach the innermost holy of holies of Elaine Willoughby's heart, and then, to rule at Lakemere—to secretly lord it later in the Circassia. With a fine acumen, he refrained from making a single enemy among her sighing swains or her fawning women parasites. "They must not suspect my game here," he sleekly smiled.

But one brooding shadow hung over the sunshine of these days. He was always aware of the frequent visits of Judge Endicott. And Justine's recitals proved to him that a hidden sorrow had its seat in her mistress' soul.

There were dark days when Elaine Willoughby's heart failed under the burden of a past which Vreeland had never tried to penetrate. She was inacces-

sible then. Guarding a perfect silence as to his own antecedents, he trusted to her in time to unfold to him the secrets of the heart which he had secretly sworn to dominate.

"I can be patient. I can afford to wait," he mused, as with a faithful assiduity he came and went, and marked no shadows on the happy dial of those summer days.

"She is worth serving seven years for," he mused; "and, for her fortune—with Lakemere—seventeen."

"When I am master here," he secretly exulted, "I can say: 'Soul! thou hast much goods!'"

And so he bided his time, and yet, with keen analysis, decided to make his *coup* before the fretful and intriguing Hathorn returned.

"It is the one chance of a lifetime," he mused, as he paced the lawns of Lakemere. "Once that her social support would be withdrawn, once that this suspicious devil, Hathorn, would 'drop on' the dangerous game I am playing, I would be soon ground between the millstones of fate."

And his soul was uneasy as the October days approached and the blue haze of the golden Indian summer began to drift down the Hudson.

He came to the conclusion at last to put his fate to the test. For certain letters received from Hathorn at the Isle of Wight had prepared him for the explosion of a social bomb which wrecked forever Frederick Hathorn's dreams of regaining the alienated heart of the woman who had led him up the ladder of life.

And that part of the situation which was seen "as through a glass darkly" was quickly made clear by the confidence of a fond woman who had begun to

invest Mr. Harold Vreeland with all the virtues and many of the graces. Caught on the rebound, her heart was opening to her artful admirer.

The thorns upon Hathorn's rosebud were sharp enough. He already felt the keenness of the petted Mme. Alida's egoistic and unruly nature. And, in a clouded present, he looked back regretfully to a golden past, with every fear of a stormy future. It was the old story of two women and one man, with the poisoned-tongued society intermeddler.

There had been a little happening at the Isle of Wight which was the direct result of the young millionaire matron displaying at a yachting ball the diamond necklace which had been Elaine Willoughby's wedding gift. Then, the tongue of envy found its ready venom.

One of those sleek devils in woman form who are the social scavengers of the world, had glowered upon those secretly coveted gems as they rose and fell upon the bosom of the young moonlight beauty.

She uttered lying words which sent Alida Hathorn back to her summer cottage with pallid lips and heart aflame.

The story was soon wafted across the sea by a sister spider, who had easily followed on the first bitter quarrel between the two parties to the "marriage of the year." And Harold Vreeland, now on post, a watchful sentinel at Elaine Willoughby's side, was the first one to whom her own outraged heart was poured out, as Mrs. Volney McMorris drove back to her own lair at Larchmont.

Out in the dreamy gardens, in a summer house, to the accompaniment of falling leaves and sighing pines, the indignant lady of Lakemere told her ardent

listener the story of a shameful jealousy and the outpouring of a maddened woman's wrath.

It gave to Harold Vreeland the needed cue. The decisive moment had come, and he hazarded his future upon the chance of meeting her confidence with a fine burst of manly sympathy.

To range himself forever under her colors, and to craftily lie to her, and not in vain.

His audacious devil sprite once more urged him to be both bold and wise.

Elaine Willoughby's eyes were flashing as she repeated the relation of Mrs. Volney McMorris, who, "so anxious that her dear friend should know all and not be exposed to the ignominy of a 'dead cut' from Hathorn's headstrong wife." "And, as he is a *lâche*, I would use the 'baby stare' first, my dear Elaine," was the parting shot of the departing McMorris. The lady of Lakemere was a roused tigress now.

Harold Vreeland listened breathlessly to the story of the bitter taunt that the diamond necklace and parting dinner had been Elaine Willoughby's crafty "sop to the social Cerberus" in giving her handsome secret lover, Hathorn, only a furlough for the honeymoon.

The insinuation that the young husband would carry on a *ménage à trois* had crazed the suspicious heiress, whose new wedding bonds burned like molten gold.

"I shall soon know if Frederick Hathorn is an unutterable craven," proudly said Elaine to her serpent listener.

"She has publicly boasted that he shall cease all semblance of friendship with me, and Mrs. McMorris told me that Alida had forced every detail of our

past intimacy out of her husband, who admitted only a confidential business relation.

“‘Break it off!’ was Alida’s ultimatum, and she has publicly declared ‘war to the knife.’”

“When Hathorn referred to our business connection, so profitable to the firm, Alida had cried: ‘I have money enough for both of us. I married a gentleman, *not a counter jumper!* You shall drop all this humbug business which has been the cloak to your *amourette.*’”

Elaine Willoughby saw the wonderment of Vreeland’s eyes. With a blush reddening her pale cheek, she faltered: “The maid overheard the quarrel, and she told Mrs. McMorris all. She was once her own attendant.”

“That McMorris is a genius,” mused Vreeland, as Mrs. Willoughby concluded: “And, Hathorn has been silent. I have not heard one word from him.” Her bosom heaved as she gloomily said: “I will give him a last chance to speak out, and if he acts the moral coward, then it is *war to the knife!*”

“Her husband’s lady-love! An ex-goddess! ‘A star on the retired list!’ I will make her pay for these brutal vulgarities! I will force him to speak, and in her presence!”

The artful Mr. Harold Vreeland fancied that he had discovered the reason of the storms of sorrow which had swept over the lady of Lakemere. He knew not of Endicott’s bootless quest for a message from the misty shores of the past. “*These two women foes will decide my fate!*” he quickly decided. “Here is the place to leap into the breach and widen it.”

Taking Elaine Willoughby’s trembling hands in his own, he fixed his ardent eyes upon her, and once



more her glances fell under the spell of his steady gaze.

His voice had the ring of sincerity in it as he proceeded with a feigned reluctance.

"You need not wait, Madonna!" Mr. Vreeland had easily reached the stage of a special appellation for the Queen of the Street.

"He has already spoken, and I will fight in this good cause—to the death, under your colors."

He drew out a letter from Hathorn and read it slowly, without a single comment, and with a dramatic, hushed solemnity.

Before he had finished he saw in her glowing eyes that she was his prey. The poisoned arrow had struck home. She was, after all, a woman at heart.

Hathorn's jerky letter referred to the "end of the season," "a return *incognito*," and demanded an early meeting with his chum. "I presume that you know all of Potter's troubles. He wants to become a 'special partner,' and then to go away for two years. You must join us at once, or I must find another man. So, have your answer ready." Elaine Willoughby was silent until Vreeland slowly read:

"I count on you to control in future Mrs. Willoughby's business. Make yourself her friend and confidant. My wife is a tiger-cat of jealousy. Some fools or fiends have been working upon her spoiled babyhood. I've vainly told her that the woman whom she hates was past her youth and old enough to be her mother; but she will listen to no reason.

"Now, old fellow, you can easily gain Mrs. Willoughby's good will. Her account is the best on the Street, and, in this way, if you join us, we can divide the profits, and I am then safe from a fruitless



quarrel. Of course, I've got to drop the Willoughby for good."

There was a shrill cry of rage and defiance. Vreeland's heart leaped up.

"Let me read the rest of that *alone*," cried Elaine, with blazing eyes. After a moment's pause, she handed it back, when she had noted Hathorn's signature.

"He asks you to cable him your decision!" breathlessly said the Queen of the Street.

"I have simply telegraphed: '*Impossible! I decline!*'" answered Vreeland, and then, in the silence the shade of Judas Iscariot laughed far down in hell.

Their hands met in a silent pledge of a friendship which shone in Elaine Willoughby's misty eyes. "*How can I thank you?*" she began; but gravely Harold Vreeland addressed her to her growing astonishment.

"Wait!" he said, with a seeming reluctance. "I never would have shown you that letter but to save your own noble soul from the humiliation of stooping to a conference with a man who would so meanly trade upon your past bounty and try to trap you, through me. Your confidence has brought this out. But, you must hear all. I claim no credit for declining to be the man to hoodwink you. 'The pleasant days of Aranjuez' are waning fast. I am soon going to leave New York and go back to the great West."

Vreeland noted the quick, convulsive start, and his heart rejoiced as she grasped his hands, whispering: "Never! My one faithful knight shall stay here *near me* to battle in my defense, 'even if I am old enough to be Alida Hathorn's mother.' Tell me all. It is my right now to know all your plans."

The handsome adventurer raised his grave face to her own. "I will, if you will promise me to ignore these two people—the hollow-hearted man who would use me to entrap you, and that saucy girl, a spoiled child from her cradle. Hathorn carries his own future punishment around with him in that crisp bundle of dimity."

The unspoken pledge of her eyes told him that his *coup* had succeeded. "By Jove!" he mused, "she is only a woman, like the rest. The taunt as to her age has cut her deeper than this fellow's rank ingratitude."

He gazed upon her Indian summer beauty, and his eyes strayed away to the pillared glories of the matchless country mansion. "She's worth the risk—with Lakemere," he reflected. "I'll try it!" He yielded and spoke, and she listened with tender eyes.

And the shadows deepened around them, as the young schemer told a plaintive story of emotional lying embroidery to the woman whose agitated heart was swept with a storm of revengeful feeling.

A passionate desire to punish the younger woman whose husband had used the mean taunt of her sunset years to quiet the jealous little spitfire heiress.

"I did not come to New York City under false pretenses," began Vreeland, "but, Hathorn has taken me wrongly to be a rich man. I am only a poor man to-day, and a weary and a lonely life lies before me."

"I could not muster the hundred thousand dollars needed to go into their firm, for I have made myself poor in the discharge of a sacred duty."

With a fine affectation of manly earnestness, he then told the generous-hearted woman a romantic tale of his gifted father's career, and of the death of his

patient mother. He judiciously unfolded the story of his father's professional errors, and painted that "sudden taking off" in the wilds of Montana.

A knowledge of Judge Endicott's encyclopedic memory, and some previous hints from the wary Justine, caused Vreeland to put in a hidden plea in bar, to offset any private researches of the only two men whom he feared in Elaine's glittering entourage. They were the silver-haired Hiram Endicott and the manly Conyers.

Once or twice he had observed the latter's eyes searching him in no unmeaning hostility.

There were tears on Elaine Willoughby's lashes as he concluded with manly earnestness:

"Left with a supposedly ample fortune, I found, on an examination of my father's private papers, that there was before me a sacred task of restitution. A work of self-abnegation, of simple honesty, lay before me.

"I had never known of the baleful influence of the woman who led my father (once in her clutches) on to lead a double life.

"But, in justice to his own better self and in honor of my beloved mother's memory, I gave up nearly all, and so arrived here with only a few thousand dollars in my pocket."

The shades had deepened around them when he concluded with his last master stroke of manly simplicity.

"Chance threw me across Hathorn in the train as I came here to collect the only honest money left to me after my work of secret restitution was done. I saw that he valued only money—success—and the glitter of your hot-hearted swell circles.

"It was hard for me to dishonor a father's memory.

To undeceive my old college friend, I intended to ask him later for aid—for employment. But I soon saw that I would not get it. He fell into the innocent error of supposing me to be very rich.

"And," the young special pleader rose as he said, under his voice, "*I met you there—at the depot!* My heart and soul craved another sight of you. And that I might meet you again, *I did not undeceive him.*"

"You know the rest. I have been true to you, and I have given up my last hope of fortune in refusing to be his tool."

He could see her splendid eyes shining upon him through her happy tears.

"Let us go in, Harold," she softly said. "I must think! I must think! But promise me that you will not go away from New York till I bid you. Trust to me."

"I promise," he gravely said, as he lifted her trembling hand and kissed it, and then, arm in arm, they wandered back to her splendid pleasure palace. *It was the "betrayal with a kiss."*

After the dinner, to which a few of the nearest county magnates had been previously bidden, Vreeland watched Elaine's imperial bearing as she proudly queened it in the drawing room.

A richer rose burned upon her cheek. Her eyes were lit up with a strange fire, and her magnificent voice echoed in every heart with a thrill of a quivering life, as her defiant soul rose to the prelude of that coming war with the jealous girl who had determined to shine down the Lady of Lakemere.

The last carriage load of guests had rattled away, and Mme. Lafarge, wearied "*dame de compagnie*," was nodding, with her eyes hopefully fixed upon the old

colonial hall clock, when Elaine said, softly: "One last word with you in the library."

The Queen of the Street stood there with downcast eyes before the great carved mantle, as she slowly said: "They will arrive in three or four days. You must confirm your answer to him."

"He has told me that you know stocks, and are familiar with all board matters."

Vreeland bowed in silence.

"Then," she said, fixing her sparkling eyes upon him, "I will make you a confession. I had decided to withdraw gradually my entire business from their firm. In fact, I have been already secretly operating through a trusted friend *on the outside*."

"You must find a good man, one acceptable to Hiram Endicott."

"I will set you up, and Hathorn & Potter shall soon find a rival. I will carry the war into the enemy's camp. So be on your guard. *Hathorn must never know!*"

"It is the only punishment for his abandonment at the first hostile signal from his enraged wife. I have made him on the Street! *I can unmake him!*" Her voice had the ring of a singing bugle calling to arms."

"But, I have no money," the crafty Judas faltered.

"Leave that to me," laughingly said Elaine. "You are now my own knight. Here are your colors."

She handed him a knot of ribbon blue. "Come to me next week. Meet him frankly and decline all connection. Senator Alynton will be here then."

And she smiled and pressed a rosy finger to her lips.

"The Sugar magnate!" whispered the happy Vreeland, as he stood spellbound, while his goddess fled up the stair, leaving him there alone.



## CHAPTER IV.

## "WYMAN AND VREELAND" SWING THE STREET.

Mr. Harold Vreeland was awake with the birds, and in an early morning walk long communed with himself under the whispering trees of Lakemere. The enchanting prospect of the superb estate delighted his eyes more with every visit. He blessed the goddess Fortune, and smiled truly, "the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places!"

It was only with a severe struggle that he concealed the secret joy now burning in his heart, and he carefully laid out all his plans for the crucial week to come. He must widen the breach.

There was the conference with Senator Alynton, Hiram Endicott, and that strange "big brother," Hugh Conyers. He felt instinctively that these three men would not share "Madonna's" enthusiasm.

He aimed to continually efface himself and to allow the resentful woman to goad herself along in the path of social and financial revenge.

"Any fool can stand hard times, but it takes a wise man to keep his head, under a run of winning luck!" he mused, with reminiscences of "Mr. John Oakhurst" and his pithy proverb, that "the luck usually got tired—before the man did."

He retraced his steps to the house, and was most calmly quiescent and tenderly respectful in his adieu.

"That burst of confidence has fixed her—for good!" he mused.



"You are to report to me, here, by letter, the result of your interview with that man!" hurriedly whispered Elaine Willoughby, as her "knight" turned toward the wagonette. "I will summon you here, when Alynton comes. Do nothing else. Leave all to me." And his eyes burned into her soul, as he promised a happy slave's obedience.

The bright smile of the dark-eyed enthusiast haunted him all the way to New York. "Talleyrand was right," he murmured, at ease in the parlor car, "*Point de zèle!* She will make all the running for me." He enjoyed the salutations showered right and left on him, as the train picked up the men of note carrying the hopes and fears of a new week to Gotham. "I am a somebody now!" he grinned.

The rising light of the Sentinel and Locust clubs, the man who had superbly engineered the brilliant Hathorn-VanSittart's nuptials—"the great Montana capitalist," was surely a man of mark, and Nature's easy gifts had earned him a warm welcome in the slightly jaded circles of the Four Hundred. He was, moreover, a "new face," and several spasms of unrest under aristocratic corsages had already proved that there were eyes "which brightened when he came."

As for his false *rôle* of man of leisure and *élégant*—"custom of it, had made a property of easiness." "I am a fraud—and—half these anæmic swells are fools as well as frauds!—I am content!" he smilingly decided, as he reviewed his plans for a daring course during the next trying week.

As he had surmised, a telegram awaited him at the Waldorf from the returned Hathorn. It was of a simple directness.

"Meet me to-night, seven. Old York Club. Must

have your answer reconsidered. Every inducement possible." The subtle smile of triumph which played around his lips recalled Private Ortheri's stern remark, "See that beggar—got him!"—as he dropped the faraway Pathan with the "long shot."

All day, Frederick Hathorn secretly tormented himself over the curt answer, "Will be there. Vreeland." There was much before the tortured bridegroom to arrange. The mutinous Dickie Doubleday, phantom of audacious and unrestful beauty, was now driving Mr. James Potter out of his wits.

He longed for a "boat upon the shore and a bark upon the sea!" He had learned that in some distant Afghan hole called "Swat," there were neither post-offices, telegraphs, banks, detectives, song and dance theatres, nor any of the machinery of a "bastard civilization" which the reckless Miss Dickie could work to ensnare or follow him.

"By Gad! Just the place! I'll get a white shirt—brown myself up like parched coffee, and turn into a Ghazi, or Dervish, or fighting Mollah—or, any old thing. She is a hummer. Pray God, that some other good-looking fellow will soon catch her 'wandering eye.' Her constancy is an 'abnormal feature' of later development. This is the only time in her life that she has stuck to a victim—for over three months. Other fellows should help me bear the burden."

There was all the details of Hathorn's newly enhanced social state to arrange. The Union and Metropolitan clubs were to be haunt of Benedick—the married man. And—the war to the knife, the fight of Marius and Sylla now lay before him.

There was Oakwood, his wife's magnificent place at Ashmont, awaiting its social *monture*. Her Imperious

Ladyship Alida had ordered him to go in for the pennant-bearing honors of Vice Commodore of the Ashmont Yacht Club, and her beautiful schooner, "L'Allouette," was awaiting his practical hand.

A positive mandate for the best box at the Horse Show, and a royal gallery box in the tiara-wearing tier of the Opera, were matters of pressing urgency.

Hathorn was already "broken in" as a "general advance agent" and "heavy man" for his wife's "Great Moral Matrimonial Show," and that lady, with the coming Hathorn-Willoughby feud first in her mind, had brought luggage enough for Cleopatra and all her nymphs on that record-breaking voyage of splendor to the Cydnus.

All these and many more things busied the disgruntled Hathorn until the hour set for the meeting with Vreeland. He had posted his wife and her train away up to the Buckingham, for he felt, instinctively, that the handsome groomsman was not just the party to linger around his newly-enclosed sheepfold.

He had already discovered several shades of color in his rosebud not visible to the ante-nuptial eye, and, moreover, he was hungry for news of Elaine Willoughby and of her state of mind. He now saw the "firm's" interests seriously endangered.

There was the vastly profitable past business connection, and "Sugar," too, loomed up before him now as a vanishing pyramid of alluring sweetness. He knew that the woman whom he had coldly left had been the very spirit of his own wonderful success.

But Hathorn never knew how eagerly Vreeland, at the Waldorf, his anxiety veiled by a thoughtful smile, watched the clock hands crawl around till seven.

"That fool has but one chance left to ruin me forever

—and—to block my little game!” restlessly reflected Vreeland. “If he only had the manly nerve to dash up to Lakemere and to throw himself there on Elaine’s generosity, he might be forgiven—even now. The swaying bosom of womanhood is always ripe for forgiveness. A woman is fondly weak to a man who calls up a lost love. And he has been all in all to her, in the past days.

“She set him up on a high pedestal and fairly worshipped him.

“Perhaps he felt like the Frenchman, that two women are necessary to every man—one whom he loves, and one who loves him.”

But the telegraphed reports of his secret spies arriving every half hour, told the delighted Vreeland that Hathorn was still “at the office.”

“Give me to-night, and just one telegram to reach the Madonna—then—I will have made that breach irrevocable!” gleefully cried Vreeland, as he was driven down to the Old York Club.

The two men met in an apparent cordiality, and the Western man’s poker nerve stood by him, as he calmly enjoyed a dinner, at which Hathorn merely nibbled, with an ill-concealed restlessness.

They exhausted all the usual banalities with regard to the well-beaten paths of the wedding tour, and Mr. Vreeland was graceful in all his perfunctory interest in the young Adam and Eve in their newly found Paradise.

When the cigars and liqueurs brought them around to the “hard-pan” stage of the interview, and a guarded seclusion, with a slow constrained manner—Frederick Hathorn began to carefully interrogate the “devil whom he had let out of the bottle.”

Vreeland keenly eyed the speaker through the blue-curling smoke of a Henry Clay, and, when Hathorn had reviewed all his past arguments as to the proposed business connection, he buried his head in his hands in deep thought.

Hathorn had even offered to aid Vreeland with the capital to qualify him as a member of the projected firm of "Hathorn, Potter & Vreeland." It was a clear "giveaway" of his temporizing fears of the coming war.

"You see, you could swing Mrs. Willoughby's account and give it your special attention," concluded the man who had now shown every card in his hand.

Hathorn noticed, with a growing uneasiness, that Vreeland had been very reticent. The "Montana capitalist" had grown pompously solemn.

Suddenly his old college chum lifted his head, and frankly eyed the anxious banker. "Have you conferred with Mrs. Willoughby on this plan?" he said, curtly. It was pinning his dupe to the cross—this sly thrust.

Hathorn stammered, as he reddened, "Why—no! I have left that all to you. I have not written her nor seen her, since the wedding dinner. The fact is—" and the alert man of the world was left strangely searching for words which seemed to die away on his lips. He dared not betray his wife's orders.

"I may as well say frankly," impressively remarked Vreeland, "and, right here—once for all, that I can not enter your firm. I have made other plans. The thing you propose is impossible. I am sorry—but it is *impossible*."

"How does Mrs. Willoughby look at it? I thought that you were getting on splendidly there?" feebly



urged Hathorn, conscious that he was very rapidly slipping "down hill."

There was a fine show of regret in Vreeland's speaking eyes, as he slowly answered, "My dear boy! You have made the mistake of your life. There are some very ugly social rumors current in my clubs—" he paused, "more in sorrow than in anger."

"And those stories wafted over the sea do not lose by the telling. I have refrained from even mentioning your name, or that of your wife, to Mrs. Willoughby since this petticoat cabal has taken up the subject of the impending social war. Women's unbridled tongues are the furies' whip-lashes."

Hathorn sprang up in excitement. "By Jove! Hod! I look to you to tell me the whole miserable business. I've taken you up and worked you in at Lakemere. You have got to stand by me now."

"Hold on! Stop right there." coldly remarked Vreeland, with a vicious gleam in his stony eyes. "I never mention a woman's name. That is a point of honor with me. I am no club scavenger."

"You know what you owe to Elaine Willoughby. She was the architect of *your* fortunes. Perhaps she builded better than she knew."

"You can not face the situations publicly. I advise you to keep silent—and—to *keep others silent*."

"Now, beyond that I will not go. I feel that your references to me, and what you have done for me, authorize me to say that I have more than repaid you in the volunteer labors of your wedding."

"Once for all, let us drop Mrs. Willoughby. I will not, in any way, take sides in this unfortunate affair, save to silently cleave to the Lady of Lakemere, through good and evil report."



"If you dare not face her, if you have abandoned her to the mercies of the pack of be-diamonded old ghouls who are slandering her, you know, of course, that you will close the door of your house to every friend of hers." The bridegroom was cornered—and his heart was filled with a sullen despair.

Hathorn strode up and down the room in a white rage. He paused, at last, before Vreeland, and then, in a choking voice, said: "I must ask you to return my last confidential letter."

Vreeland calmly moved toward the door. "I am a free man—am I not?" he quietly said. "I believe a letter is the property of the party to whom addressed when regularly delivered through the mail. When you divide the clans of society you will find me—*on the other side*.

"And, as my time is of value, you will now excuse me. Don't force me to tell Potter, whom I respect, that you only wanted to use me as a stool pigeon to entrap the woman who has made you what you are—a solid man—in Wall Street!"

With a mad impulse, Hathorn sprang to the door.

"No! by Jove! No row here!" he muttered, and when he sauntered downstairs with an assumed carelessness, his guest had departed.

There was a "lively interlude in married life" transacted late that evening "behind closed doors," at the Buckingham, in which Mr. Frederick Hathorn, for the second time that evening, suffered a sore defeat, and "went below" to seek the consolation of Otard-Dupuy & Co.'s very ripe old pale cognac.

That bright-eyed falcon, Alida Hathorn, then and there ran up the red flag of "War to the Knife"—and "No Surrender!"

But the jubilant Harold Vreeland slept not till he had personally, at Broadway and Twenty-third Street, sent off an urgent dispatch to Lakemere. "I think that reads strongly enough," chuckled Vreeland, as he gazed on the words.

"He played the craven. Wanted me to give him secret reports of your affairs, and then demanded his letters back. All relations are permanently broken off. Will guard absolute silence."

It was at his leisurely breakfast in the Palm Garden, the next morning, that Vreeland, with a wildly-beating heart, tore open "Madonna's" answering message.

He stifled the cry of exultation which rose to his lips, for the Rubicon was passed. It was really now "*Guerra à cuchillo!*"

Elaine Willoughby's words were replete with that *fortiter in re* which the unlucky Hathorn was destined later to realize. He only knew her *suaviter in modo*.

"Ignore him. Be ready to report when I call you. Party from Washington expected in three days. Stand to your colors!" The signature, "True Blue," was a reminder of their secret pact.

"I think, Mr. Frederick Hathorn, that I have you 'dead to rights' now," mused Vreeland, who determined that the "social war" should blaze up fiercely, but without his hand at the bellows.

A round of calls in the next three days proved to him that Mrs. Alida Hathorn had harked back on all the old intimacy of the unhappy bridegroom, and was diligently sowing broadcast the Cadmus teeth of merciless and pointed satire upon the "sunset beauty on the retired list." "*A woman old enough to be my mother!*"

When appealed to by many bright-eyed *banditti*,

Mr. Harold Vreeland merely sadly shook his head in a vague deprecation. "I know nothing whatever," he softly sighed. "All this sudden gossip is Greek to me, Greek of Cimmerian darkness."

In the two clubs which he most affected, Vreeland—in a manly burst of platform oratory—when appealed to by eager quidnuncs—sternly announced his code.

"I never take a woman's name on my lips in gossip. I know nothing, I have heard nothing—and—excuse me—I will listen to nothing. Both the ladies are valued friends of mine." He was voted a "thoroughbred."

But, in his craven heart, he rejoiced at the rapid spreading of the war. Knowing that Hathorn would watch him, he avoided lower New York until after Madame Elaine Willoughby had made one brief downtown visit for a serious consultation with her agent, Endicott.

With a well-judged cautionary wisdom, he also avoided the "Circassia," which was, indeed, watched by Hathorn's spies, and he grinned with delight when his growing band of friends re-echoed his own skillfully planted suggestion of a winter trip to Europe.

"*I am* thinking of an extended tour," he frankly admitted, and he soon knew that this had reached the humiliated Hathorn, for James Potter, Esq., in a personal visit, urged Vreeland to join him in that memorable expedition to "Swat," which was to throw the *mutine* Miss Dickie Doubleday forever "off the track."

"I'll give you a *carte blanche* as my guest, Vreeland," laughed Potter. "You can take anybody you want on my yacht—*save only that bright-eyed devil, Dickie.*"

It was evident Hathorn had not "blabbed," for Potter gaily said: "I don't blame you for keeping out of business. Lucky dog that you are—Hathorn has got a first-class man, Renard Wolfe, to go in as active, and I relapse into a special partner—but we would have sooner had you."

When Vreeland hastened back to Lakemere, in answer to a laconic dispatch, "*Come up at once*," he knew of the increasing bitterness of the impending war. Mrs. Willoughby, riding through Pine Street, had given her one-time protégé Hathorn the dead cut, before a dozen magnates of Wall and Broad, to their open-eyed amazement.

Every broker on the Street was now eager to snap up "the Willoughby's" business, and Mr. James Potter, abstracting a "Gaiety Girl" from an inchoate visiting troupe, had hastily set sail for "Swat," via the Suez canal, with a little *partie carrée* to avoid a storm of queries—couched with "Say, old fellow, what the old Harry's all this rumpus between the Hathorns and your 'star' customer?"

The placid Potter, far out beyond Fire Island, delightedly left the "high contracting parties" to fight it out between them, *a la mode de Kilkenny*.

And, the wonder grew as the golden letters "Hathorn, Wolfe & Co." soon took the place of the conquering device, "Hathorn & Potter," over the door of the booth in Mammon's mart where Elaine Willoughby's helping hand had built up the fortune of the ingrate protégé.

The handsome Vreeland was light-hearted as he approached Lakemere, for he was pondering over a letter of special invitation received to a *diner de cérémonie* to emphasize the reopening of Mrs. Alida

Hathorn's superb Fifth Avenue mansion, a patrimonial hereditament gloriously embourgeoned for that winter social campaign in which Mrs. Alida proposed to crush "that woman Willoughby."

The young matron had taken the bit between her teeth and was boldly rallying all her clans, with a fine social programme adapted to both attract the "outer woman," and charm the "inner man."

Vreeland's courteous declination of the dinner on the ground of "his impending departure," had caused Mrs. Alida to dispatch the energetic Mrs. Volney McMorris to glean from Vreeland, in an artfully contrived "chance interview" at the Waldorf, all these details of the sudden estrangement which the bride of a few months could not extract from the morose Hathorn.

But, always sedate and sly, Vreeland brought all his batteries to bear on the double-faced Madame Janus, who had already earned a diamond bracelet by her Vidocq operations from Hathorn's reckless wife.

The "McMorris Investigating Committee" was a flat failure. Vreeland—a glib liar—"voiced his yearning" for London and its extensive jungles replete with the social lion, alive or stuffed.

He gracefully glided out of the buxom gossip's snares and bore off a full account of Alida Hathorn's plans, and a true relation of that encounter in the leafy mazes of Central Park, where the watchful Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, from the citadel of her victoria, froze the beautiful Mrs. Hathorn with a pointed ignoring of the woman whose "wedding dinner" had been the vaunt of Lakemere.

The fortuitous presence of Senator David Alynton, with his secret partner, the Queen of the Street—the



astonishment of that lovely blonde patrician, Mrs. Mansard Larue, the companion of Hathorn's imprudent wife, had given the news of the "incident" to all the gentlewomen in Gotham, as well as to clubdom.

Messrs. Merriman, Wiltshire and Rutherford, in a noisy cabal at the Old York Club, waylaid every "good knight and true," until, when their discussion had reached its height, the accidental incoming of Hathorn brought about a strained and solemn hush, in which "the beating of their own hearts was all the sound they heard."

With a whitening face, Hathorn sped away to the Fifth Avenue fortress of the VanSittart tribe, to angrily demand, "What new tomfoolery is on the tapis?" while the three young buzzards of the club spread the news that "the battle is on—once more—" and then, gaily whetted their youthful beaks accordingly upon the succulent elephantine tips of their "sticks."

Eager leopards of the "society journals" lurking in that dim penumbra between "the high tin gods" and the "toilers of New York," seized upon the garbled details and, with rending sarcasm, and thinly varnished innuendo, hinted that the "first blood and knock-down" of this finish fight were to be credited to that remarkably knowing matron, Madame Elaine Willoughby, of Lakemere.

"It has gone on too far ever to be healed, this breach between the sundered hearts," delightedly decided the buoyant Vreeland, as he stepped out of the train at Irvington. "All I have to do now, is not to cross my own luck."

He was startled as, when about to enter the wagonette, a village lad on watch shyly bade him walk into the ladies' waiting room, where the adroit Justine

was waiting for him with tidings of moment. Mr. Harold Vreeland had won the caoutchouc heart of the piercing-eyed French soubrette by his golden largesse. He had learned the importance of "parting freely" when it was to his profit, and several hundred dollars of Jimmy Potter's poker money had already enlarged the growing hoard with which Justine proposed to buy a neat cabaret in Paris and set up a bull-throated gamin whom she resolutely adored.

"Be on your guard!" Justine whispered. "Mr. Hathorn has just now tried to bribe me to watch you and Mrs. Willoughby. He has tormented Doctor Hugo Alberg, also. The Doctor is my friend," modestly admitted Justine, with the deference of dropped eyes to her imperiled "character."

"I have been down at New York arranging the 'Circassia' for our home-coming. Hathorn has offered Doctor Alberg anything to bring him once more accidentally into Mrs. Willoughby's presence.

"He came up yesterday to Lakemere—and yet Madame absolutely declined to see him, and so she returned his card. And, to the old lawyer, *ce brave vieux* Endicott, he, too, has made the call—to demand a hearing'—as an old friend.

"I heard Madame and the Judge talking. And now—to-day—there are the Senator, the journalist, Monsieur Conyers, and the Judge Endicott all day in the library with Madame. So, *mon ami*, beware!"

The fifty-dollar bill which Vreeland pressed into her hand was an inspirational piece of good judgment, and Gallic prayers from a too-inflammable heart followed him as he darted away to the wagonette.

"I will back the Queen of Hearts to win!" mused the vigilant Vreeland, as he arranged his "society

face" for that watchful and nonchalant repose which totally disarmed the three men whom he met at dinner.

There was not an awkward undercurrent of import to the evening in which Harold Vreeland, forewarned and forearmed, knew that he was always "under fire"—that greatest test of nerve—simply bidden to "stand fast and wait for orders."

He watched the "casement's glimmering square" long after the house was still, slowly revolving his crafty plans, and as yet ignorant of the day's secret council so vital to his future career.

He knew not of the sympathetic silence of Conyers, his fine intellectual face hidden in a window's shadow, while Endicott had frankly related all that he had known unfavorable of the late Erastus Vreeland, Attorney and Counselor at Law, Solicitor in Equity, and Proctor in Admiralty.

Senator David Alynton, remembering that the owners of the "Clarion" also owned a good-sized block of "Sugar," and were the secret press agents of the Trust, tried earnestly to obtain an opinion from the taciturn Conyers. "I know nothing whatever of this man," gallantly answered the writer. "This thing seems to me to be like a marriage—in which the seal of the bond goes on before anything definite is known of the parties' real character."

The formation of a new firm to handle the business lost by Hathorn's sudden and egoistic plunge into matrimony was the matter under discussion.

"It seems to me, Madame," said the sagacious Alynton, "that if you intend to put this young man into such a place of grave trust, there should be another partner, provided, one acceptable to our side,

and—if possible—one known to me. And we must not, moreover, have a mere tyro. I should like to approve one name in the new firm—if you select the other.”

“Be it so,” gravely said the Lady of Lakemere. “I will only say for Mr. Vreeland, that I know all of the secrets of the life of his late unfortunate father, and of the son’s manly actions in closing up all his father’s scattered affairs. I will back him with all the money needed, and, also, guarantee his good faith, provided he alone controls such ‘private business’ as is handled through me. Judge Endicott has told me nothing new of the elder Vreeland. I think I can suggest a plan to find the other man whom we want, or else a firm already in existence, which will commend itself to you, Senator. Let us advertise, guardedly, for a partner.”

With a sigh, Hiram Endicott drew Conyers out of the room, and while Senator Alynton yielded to the dark-eyed lady’s most ingenious plan, the old lawyer, under the trees, dejectedly said, “Conyers! there is again the woman enigma! A woman with heart certainly needs no head. And—a woman with a head should be heartless.

“The one can only be happy in being deluded, it seems—and the other can be properly left to coldly play the game of life in safety—and then smile at her dupes. This dear woman, unfortunately, has *both* head and heart, and so, *she must suffer*.

“This young fellow’s fine eyes have done the business—his mellow, pleading voice carries the day. To be first favorite—vice Hathorn, discharged—Vreeland, promoted from the ranks!”

While Senator David Alynton, a cool, gray-eyed

young millionaire wearer of the toga, a senator *a la mode*, listened to Elaine Willoughby's earnest arguments, he forgot that he was but forty years of age.

Though he was often an official listener to secrets in the marble capitol which might make or break the future of the Sugar Trust, he was also a *raffiné* man of the modern world—a luxury-lover—fond of money, and of its concrete power.

He knew, too well, that Elaine Willoughby was "game" to back her own candidate with a fortune as great as his own.

He felt that the past safe connection with Hathorn and Potter was broken for all time. He saw that the secret chief of the vast Syndicate blindly trusted the Queen of the Street, and, moreover, he was a man who was unable to resist the warm, womanly nature which drew him as the moon draws the seas.

"If you will personally watch over your young neophyte, Lady Mine," he said, at last, "I will side with you. Your interests are mine. I hope that you do not forget what we both have to lose." The Senator was mindful of the sanctity of his "toga," now.

With softly shining eyes, she thanked him. "After all," she laughed, her bosom heaving with the pride of victory, "you and I are the only real parties in interest here. We will let Endicott receive all the answers, and dear old Hugh Conyers can closely examine the whole record of the man whom we select as working partner.

"Between Vreeland and myself, the line of communication to you shall be guarded. As of old, Judge Endicott shall act for me—and I will alone handle all that concerns you. Even Vreeland shall never



know—there's my hand on it. You know that Hathorn has always been secretly kept "in the dark"—against the day of his turning—like the fabled worm. You are safe as regards him—while I—"

She sighed, and left the man who was the "missing link" in the great scheme of active operations, wondering if she had ever really loved Hathorn. The young Senator was unconsciously grimly jealous.

"Damned little snob!" wrathfully cried the Senator. "I hope that purse-proud young minx of a wife will make his life a hell. I fancy that she can be trusted to do that." It was Alynton's just idea of Nemesis.

The Senator had gone back to the Capital next morning with a parting pledge to make a flying visit to the "Circassia" in two weeks to settle the vital matter on Mrs. Willoughby's winter hegira to New York, and the active lawyer and the busy journalist had also fled back to Gotham before Elaine Willoughby in the summer home had listened to all of Harold Vreeland's accurate relation.

"I can not afford to tell her the whole truth—as yet!" he had rightly decided, and he wisely abstained from adding a shade of color. For she was watching him keenly. It was the turning tide of his life.

"You are my own true knight," she gaily said, with an assumed lightness. "I wish you to ignore this coming social battle entirely. You are to be strictly non-committal. I will deal with both the Hathorns. Read that." She handed him a paper. "In this way we will receive tenders from perhaps fifty individuals, and even from some good firms already established.

"I will myself, handle the secret side of the operations, and Judge Endicott will guide you in my general business. When we have found the right man

as a partner, our whole party will examine his past through the various mercantile agencies, surety companies, business detectives, and then, Endicott and Conyers, too, can throw on the searchlight.

"The new firm will go ahead—I can answer for that—and I will then be free to openly meet Mrs. Alida Hathorn, on her chosen battle ground of Vanity Fair.

"You are to do nothing but to simply wait at the Waldorf—and come to me daily at the 'Circassia.'

"As for Hathorn—a strict avoidance of him—that is my one condition."

"The quarrel—but—the cold oblivion of the grave! Your friendship is dead to him!"

"And—you are never to mention their names in society. Leave them to me."

"I swear it—by this," solemnly said Vreeland, as he kissed the knot of ribbon blue. The glistening-eyed woman saw that it had lain on his heart.

She rose and left him to study the strange public call for a collaborator in that fierce fight for "the unearned increment" which was to make his fortune—by a woman's fondly trusted faith.

He read an advertisement which made a huge increase a week later in Hiram Endicott's daily mail. For the *Herald*, in special display, in its financial page, printed the following—in an artful display:

"To Capitalists and Stock Brokers."

"*Wanted.*—A gentleman of the highest integrity, who controls one of the largest speculative stock businesses in and around New York City, desires to meet an associate with \$200,000 cash, with view of establishing New York Stock Exchange house, or would

make partnership arrangement with a New York Stock Exchange firm who desire to increase their business. References given and required. Principals only. Address, for one week,

"H. E., *Herald* Downtown."

Mrs. Elaine Willoughby had been a month entrenched in her apartments at the "Circassia," and the last summer roses had drifted down over the silent walks of Lakemere, before the astute Vreeland had made a surface acquaintance with Mr. Horton Wyman, whose name later headed the sober-looking black and gold sign on a spacious Broad Street office, reading, "Wyman & Vreeland, Bankers and Brokers!" For the new firm had been bravely launched by Alynton and his lovely ally.

All that Vreeland knew was that Mr. Horton Wyman was a near relative of Senator David Alynton, and that he had just given up the cashiership of a respectable bank to enter the New York Stock Exchange.

The adventurer, lost in admiration of Elaine Willoughby's executive ability, never knew of that *tête-à-tête* dinner, and the long council of the Queen of the Street with Alynton and Judge Endicott.

Out of fifty applications, Mr. Horton Wyman had been selected. As Senator Alynton pithily said, "It's my man and my money against your man and your money." The Senator himself had answered the call for his relative.

He did know that Judge Endicott's nephew, Noel, was the cashier of the new firm, now in full blast, and that he alone received the orders of the Queen of the Street from the private wires in the Hanover Bank Building.

And he knew, too, that Mr. Frederick Hathorn's office boasted no longer the "inside tip" on Sugar from the woman who was carrying a social war "into Africa" and had already staggered even the audacious Mrs. Alida.

The checks of the new firm on the "Chemical Bank" were already recognized as those of people "who could swing the Street," and some daring "deals" had opened the game.

It was Vreeland's duty to confer once daily with his strangely-found benefactress, and yet, he felt even now that he was but half within the door.

But one bitter hatred followed his rising star, and he soon heard the sneer of Frederick Hathorn: "So he lied to me, and has sneaked into business behind a woman's petticoats.

"Wait! Set a beggar on horseback—he will ride to the devil." For all that, "they never spoke as they passed by." The war was now on in earnest.

## CHAPTER V.

## TOWARD THE ZENITH.

It had been the one haunting dream of Harold Vreeland's fevered young manhood to finally reach a financial position wherein "the solid ground" would not fail beneath his feet. Before the Christmas snows had whitened the roofs of old Trinity his star was crawling surely toward its zenith. He was, figuratively speaking, "on velvet."

Though he realized the cogent truth of Jimmy Potter's maxim that the desire of one's heart would always finally come around to the patient man, he was yet filled with a vague uneasiness. He was entrenched at the Waldorf *en permanence*, and his personal bank account had reached the snug sum of twenty thousand dollars.

The status which he held in the firm was that of the office partner, and he was also authorized to draw one thousand dollars per month. "If you need anything else, apply to me directly," was Mrs. Willoughby's quiet order. Anxious not to show even the faintest eagerness, he was passively contented, allowing his patroness to make the game. And yet he always watched her, lynx-eyed.

"My duties," he had simply demanded.

"You are for the present to confer alone with Mr. Wyman," answered Elaine. "The books and cash will be in the sole keeping of young Noel Endicott. I may say that he alone will sign the firm's checks



and the balance sheets will be privately rendered by him to Judge Endicott, who represents me, as well as the power behind your new associate, Mr. Wyman.

"You are to carry on the current business in agreement with Wyman. Both of you will have access to all the customers' ledgers, but the conditions of your continuance as a broker is that only a strictly 'commission business' shall be carried on. And, above all things, silence and discretion."

"In other words," slowly said Vreeland, "Judge Endicott is really the responsible holder of the firm's assets."

"Precisely so," smiled Elaine. "His only nephew is the cashier and the head bookkeeper has been named by the other principal."

"Am I to confer as to details with Judge Endicott?" was Vreeland's last query.

"Only with me," she smiled. "You are to be my own knight, and I lay this last injunction on you: Business is never to be mentioned to me save in our daily interview of affairs. My social hours are sacred." He bowed and smiled.

"If anything of moment should occur," he murmured.

"You will be held harmless," she smiled. "Obey orders, if you break owners."

Perfectly conscious that Hathorn would probably spy upon him, fearful of over-reaching himself by any rash hurry, Mr. Harold Vreeland assiduously delved into all the daily business details and carefully refrained from urging on the growing social intimacy with his patroness.

Horton Wyman and Noel Endicott were both

University Club men; the last, a stalwart son of Eli, was a survival of the fittest from the shock of football and the straining oar.

The cool head bookkeeper, Aubrey Maitland, was Wyman's daily luncheon companion, and young Noel Endicott always fled away at noon hour to the Judge's office, where the oak was sported.

It was only in their regularly exchanged uptown social courtesies that Vreeland was enabled to study his partner.

It was, after all, of very little moment to him, for they both seemed to be "personally conducted" by that silvered-haired old solon, Hiram Endicott. Their way was made very smooth.

"It's a very strange situation," mused Vreeland. "I am a sort of Ishmael—playing my hand against every man's. They all think to find me soon growing uneasy and squirming around in curiosity.

"'Time and I against the whole world,' said William the Silent. It's a good motto, and I will let them make the whole game. But, by and by, I will get behind the scenes, and then 'shove the clouds along.' "

With a rare self-control, he continued his judicious self-effacing policy, and yet slyly watched the impartial welcome extended by Elaine Willoughby to the stream of notable and desirable men who thronged her hospitable halls.

The preliminary skirmishes of the coming battle with the Hathorns had vastly amused him, and "all society" knew now of the impassive prudence of the rising star. It had been Elaine Willoughby's one fault that her strong nature leaned little on other women. For her strong nature buoyed her up above the petted society dolls around her.

She knew that they were barren Sahara deserts to her; she was perfectly conscious of the absolute dearth of interest in woman natures for each other. The few respectable "relicts" who sought her bounty were always ranged near her, like old battleships on the shores of Time, honorably scarred, but "out of commission" and, unfit for action. Their mild incense of perfunctory flattery was but a prelude to the confession of their thousand little wants. And to them, she played the Lady Bountiful.

But Vreeland honestly, yet silently, gloried in Elaine Willoughby's brilliant early winter social campaign.

A lovely Napoleon, she rallied her hosts in a changed strategy of audacious energy; she chose her own battle-grounds and vastly outnumbered her enemy at every point of concentration. It was a war to the knife.

Through unknown agents, the Lady of Lakemere had deftly captured the best box in the Horse-Show, and eke the same in the Canine Exposition. She had ensnared the one most eligible Opera box upon which Mrs. Alida Hathorn doted, and then, drawing to her splendid halls the most desirable men to battle over, Mrs. Willoughby easily attracted a crowd of bright-eyed beauties there ready to struggle for their selected "eligibles," "notables," and desirables. There was music and laughter, the gleam of tender eyes, the sheen of white shoulders, the glow of ivory bosoms, and all the magnetic thrill of rich young womanhood pervading the Circassia.

It was no secret that a house party of forty would keep a "merry Christmas" at Lakemere, and, all in vain, did Alida Hathorn strive to secure the most

sparkling pendants of the "inner fringe" for the widely thrown open doors of Oakwood. Her Indian summer antagonist was an easy victor.

Some merry, audacious devil seemed to have roused himself in Elaine Willoughby's bosom, and she was boldly *lancée* now. Knowing well what a woman's war to the finish means, the sly Elaine drew off with her varied and sumptuous entertainments all the desirable men and Beauty's beautiful Cossacks soon swooped down upon them.

Only Vreeland could trace Senator Alynton's influence in the vastly enlarged glittering circle of foreign diplomats and well accredited European visitors of rank.

The Army and Navy gallantly charged upon the battalions of Mother Eve's fairest forlorn hope, and humble but effective ammunition—the canvas-back duck, the terrapin of our beloved land, choicest wines, chilled and warmed in the right order—did all the execution possible.

The delicately ordered beaufets were a "continuous performance" to a star engagement.

And, by a rare self-command, the warring woman with difficulty refrained from all open attacks upon the Hathorns, but yet deftly drawing the "financial swells" to her side by the generally accepted conclusion that there had been something wrong with Hathorn & Potter.

No one suspected the genial James of intermeddling. He had reached no further point in his voyage to Samarcand, or Swat, than gay Villefranche.

On his cozy yacht, the guileless Potter learned that Miss Dickie Doubleday, who had returned all of his "burning letters," but, none of the sparkling votive

diamonds, had dashingly captured and cut out a Western mining man of untold millions who guilelessly had drifted under her guns from a "star" of the Metropolitan opera. And, the festive Miss Dickie was now in the seventh heaven.

The gay Eastern Elijah was overjoyed to see his rosy mantle descend upon the Occidental Elisha, and he cautiously confided to his deported "Gaiety Girl" the opinion that the "sun-burned buffalo of Butte would find out a lot of things before spring." They drank the health of the faithless Dickie Doubleday in much champagne of rosy tint, as the white stars shimmered around them on the blue waters of the Mediterranean. And so, the "honors were easy" in this little game of hearts.

In vain did many friendly financiers urge Jimmy Potter's return by the often cabled news that "Hathorn was making a fool of himself in Wall Street."

"That's his own lookout," calmly replied the special partner, who rightly feared that the chasm between him and the all too amiable Dickie Doubleday was not yet quite deep enough for safety.

"By Jove! that girl is capable of running a tandem," he reflected, and, he had no desire to be hitched up later, even in silken harness, with the robust "brown buffalo of Butte." For he had drawn a "queen" in the last deal.

He would have quickly turned the prow of the "Aphrodite" homeward, however, if he had known of a strong-hearted woman's resolute determination to run the firm of Hathorn, Wolfe & Co. ashore, and to sink it under the guns of the unsuspected enemy which was now "swinging the Street."

And as artful a game as Delilah ever "put up" for



Samson, was one element of Mrs. Willoughby's campaign, for she was now "fighting all along the line."

The watchful Harold Vreeland was soon made conscious that he was an object of general interest even in the cold-hearted hurry of Manhattan. He knew that he penetrated three varying atmospheres in his daily life.

The society racket, the dress parade of the Waldorf and the clubs, was one phase of his busy existence; the shaded dignities of his Broad Street office another, and he was now assured that an invisible halo of assiduous espionage now followed him in his down-sittings and uprisings.

There was the maddened Hathorn, the inscrutable Elaine Willoughby, and his cautious and silent partner, Horton Wyman.

"*I'm pretty well followed up!*" he smiled, with a cunning glee.

Continually on guard in society, and ever straining all his mental powers to familiarize himself with all the details of their growing business and the unwritten lore of the feverish Street, Vreeland was really only uneasy at heart as to his continued probation.

For he felt now, as the holiday season approached, that he was merely being hoodwinked by the dark-eyed benefactress, whose fullest confidence he had not as yet gained.

"Madonna's" social manner was frankly charming, but he had made no progress toward any further intimacy. Some shade seemed to hold them tenderly apart. And he racked his brains in vain.

"*Ami intime de la maison!*" He had only learned more of her rare dignity in the repeated business interviews, and in the continued tableaux of her

splendid social *entourage*, he was no nearer to her than others.

There was the cool Conyers, who always came and went at will; he had also seen Senator David Alynton and the silent Wyman out driving with his lovely patroness. There were also *tête-à-tête* dinners, too, with the old Judge and that young son of Anak, Noel Endicott, and moreover the well-bribed Justine spoke, too, of breakfasts where only Wyman and the handsome bookkeeper, Aubrey Maitland, were guests. *All* this was dangerous.

"Hang me if I can see why I am kept here," uneasily fretted Vreeland. "The firm would move along just as smoothly without me," but yet in his soul he felt that the steadfast woman still held him in reserve for some well-matured purpose of her own.

With admirable *sang froid* he awaited her orders in an expectant silence.

"She shall not weary me out; but once let the cards come my way, then I will play the queen for all she is worth."

He knew in the drift of customers gradually drawn in by the now acknowledged solidity of their firm, that there were many spies and stool-pigeons of the angry Hathorns.

He knew, too, what cold resentment burned in his old chum's heart. He had secretly followed (through his agents) some of these skirmishers directly back to Hathorn, Wolfe & Co.'s office. And the cards were played both from the top and the bottom of the pack.

Once he had himself caught Hathorn's eyes following him with all the wolfish glare of a murderous heart.

There were, besides, rumors of quarrels in the

opposing firm and the early retirement of the returning Potter.

And other sly traps were laid for him with silky scoundrelism. He was well aware that the defiant Alida Hathorn had openly expressed her utter disbelief in the existence of the late Wharton Willoughby. Even the prehensile Mrs. Volney McMorris had waylaid him to confess that she had never observed, in either of Mrs. Willoughby's establishments, any mortuary bust, portrait, or even an humble photograph of the permanently eclipsed man who had given his name to the Queen of the Street. These things were food for uneasy thoughts harassing to the young schemer.

And this respectable social scavenger had faltered out some indirect javelin thrusts evidently pointed by Hathorn's willfully reckless wife.

There were at least two men in Elaine Willoughby's *entourage* who, for gain and a passion under the rose, might be the source of all that quietly-sustained splendor which had so enraged the young married heiress.

Mr. Harold Vreeland was on guard. He only fixed his fine eyes upon Mrs. McMorris in a pained surprise when that bustling dame hinted that he could easily drag forth the desired information.

"I have always had a penchant, my dear Madame, for minding my own business," was his most prudent rejoinder.

So, entrenching himself in the towers of silence, he was safe, but Vreeland also left a bitter enemy behind, on the pleasant afternoon when he wondered why Messrs. Merriman, Wiltshire, and Rutherford had bidden him "to be one of a little party of four"

at the Old York Club. It was an able effort at scientific pumping.

He had never entered that gilded fortress of the *jeunesse doree* since his last definite quarrel with Hathorn, and he knew, too, that these three "splendid examples of the evolution of American manhood" now made up a little coterie which was a sort of Three Guardsmen brotherhood around Mrs. Alida Hathorn.

There were rumors of gay little Sunday afternoon frolics at the Hathorns', justifying Pip's exclamation, "Such larks," and these three young fellows now directed the broad-gauge festivities of a home whose master always wore a stern frown like the late lamented "Baron Rudiger" of the German song.

It was Harold Vreeland's chosen part to be left judiciously uncompromised. He was still playing a waiting game. He knew that certain very *degagée* young "married women" afforded much "congenial pabulum" for these three sleek young society sharks, and that the careless Mrs. Alida Hathorn was fast drifting into their hands.

And so, after a long *séance*, wherein floods of wine drenched the festal board, the sly adventurer found out at last the motive of his sudden popularity.

When Rutherford brought up the unlaidd ghost of the late Wharton Willoughby, Vreeland cynically remarked: "I naturally know nothing of local social biography here. I am only a returned borderer, and am only engaged in making a proper business use of my capital. I stand calmly in the center of your New York circus and see its 'free show' swing around.

"My platform is that of the late Simon Cameron of

blessed memory, 'I don't care a damn what happens as long as it does not happen to me.' "

"But, the lady has intimate business relations with your firm!" babbled Merriman.

"Did Fred Hathorn tell you so?" cuttingly sneered Vreeland. "Perhaps not, as you fellows are only chummy with his smart wife. Let her find it out for herself, by a personal visit to the lady in question.

"You might ask Wyman—he knows all our thousand customers' affairs. I don't bother much with the business," loftily remarked Vreeland, as he hummed an old music hall refrain, "You can get onto an omnibus, but you can't get onto me."

He cheerfully departed, leaving his hosts to "a night of memories and sighs." He was followed with curses both deep and loud.

Vreeland put all these little matters lightly away as a part of the usual "burrowing mole" work of New York high life; but he was really astonished, a week later, when his employer's physician, Dr. Hugo Alberg, haled him away to a confidential Sunday morning breakfast.

The "German specialist" was an indurated foreign egotist of thirty, and a cunning gleam lingered behind his golden glasses.

His fresh, bewhiskered face was slightly Semitic in its cast, and his record of prosperity was all too evident in that richness of jewelry which has been a legacy of the Biblical times when the Egyptians made such incautious loans of their ornaments.

Harold Vreeland had now an unwritten chapter in his life devoted entirely to the thirsty-hearted Justine, and from that subjugated Gallic beauty he knew of all Alberg's crafty approaches upon the mistress by a



coarsely familiar wooing of the woman who had given herself over, body and soul, to Vreeland's service.

And so he marveled not that in the cozy private room at Martin's the Doctor's slim, white, "sterilized" hand reached out in the direction of a secret which Vreeland himself knew naught of.

"I'll just let this fool talk," mused Vreeland, as the intriguing foreigner became both familiar and friendly. "He has his own little scheme. Perhaps he may point me toward what no one seems to know."

And so, in an affected *bruderschaft*, the would-be vampire listened with a beating heart to Alberg's confidences when the strong Rhine wine had loosened the "Medical Arzt's" slightly thickened tongue.

"We ought to understand each other, *mein lieber* Vreeland," urged the Doctor, who had now thrown the mask off. "You and I are the two men nearest to this magnificent woman. You are her confidential man of affairs.

"You know all—you *must* know all. And a woman's best friend is always her Doctor," he grinned, with a suggestive pliancy.

"We are necessary to each other. You and I only want what all New York wants—*money!*

"Money talks in New York. Life is a hell without money. Now, my dear friend, we are both making money out of her *easily*. And to me, as well as to you, Mrs. Willoughby's life is of great importance.

"For my fee bill and your profits depend upon her being kept alive."

Vreeland started, in a sudden alarm. "Speak out, man! What the devil do you mean?" He saw a black gulf yawning before him.

"She has some concealed source of mental trouble,

some eating sorrow, some overmastering secret of her old life," bluntly answered Alberg. "You, as a man of the world, could easily guess that such a woman should be married. She is rich, still very beautiful, young enough yet—she hardly looks thirty-three—woman's royal epoch of mental force and bodily attractiveness. Now, she has strange periods of a profound mental depression.

"There are dark storms of sorrow. Her heart action is somewhat impaired, and the waves of passion beat too fiercely in her locked breast.

"*You must help me!* You may, in this way, save your own future. We must work together. Drugs will do her no good. *I am at my wits' ends!*" The gloomy Doctor buried his nose again in the Rudesheimer.

"What can I do?" flatly said Vreeland. "Speak out! Don't mince matters."

"Find out her past social history. Find out if she ever was really married. Find out if some one has a hold on her. *She is an unhappy woman at heart!*" cried Alberg. "It may be that damned cold-hearted cur, Hathorn's, desertion has cut her to the quick! Find out if she really is a *free woman!*"

"And, then?" said Vreeland, a strange light coming into his eyes.

"*Marry her yourself,*" pleaded Alberg. "*She is one woman in a million!* Take her away for a year. Lead her away from her old self. Pride brought low may have maddened her. I think that Hathorn first fathomed her past, and then, coldly left her for the younger and perhaps richer woman. It may have been too heavy a blow to her pride."

"Is there anything in this babble about Endicott

or the Senator?" huskily whispered Vreeland, reddening with shame in spite of himself.

The half-tipsy Doctor laughed. "The old man is only her business Mentor—he is as passionless as a basalt block.

"The Senator is but a cold-hearted money schemer, a Yankee coining power into hard cash. I've followed all these trails out."

"And you yourself are absolutely in the dark?" persisted Vreeland. "I've thought at times that old Endicott may be the trustee under some quiet old marital separation. I've imagined, too, that Wiloughby *mari* may not be really dead; that she, in spite of herself, learned to passionately love Hathorn, and has ardently desired him, and that he selfishly married after she had pulled him up to fortune, and then, left her powerless and tongue-tied, to pocket his brutal ingratitude.

"Whatever it is, we need each other, Vreeland. I will stand by you if you stand by me. Is it a bargain?"

"I'll see you here the same time next Sunday. Let me think this thing over," faltered Vreeland, beginning to see light at last on his way.

"I should have told you that she usually has these attacks after Endicott's occasional long private visits. It may be that the missing husband is *alive*, and is bleeding her financially with extortionate demands," was the Doctor's last confidence.

"I'll be ready to talk to you next Sunday. Let me go now," breathlessly cried Vreeland. "In the meantime, keep a close silence. You will find me to be the best friend you ever had in the world."

The schemer darted away with a sudden impulse.

Ten minutes later he sat with Justine Duprez, in a hidden little nest of her own in South Fifth Avenue. It had flashed over his mind that Mlle. Justine's Sunday off, just suited his purpose.

It was not the first time that he had communed with her there, in a room once sacred to Frederick Hathorn's private information bureau.

The startled maid had barely time to meet her generous new admirer when he questioned her sharply upon the subject of Doctor Alberg's recent revelations.

And, to his annoyance, he for the first time found the Parisian woman to be obdurate. She had been curtly abandoned by Hathorn, who had forgotten to hand over her final payment in all the hurried glories of the VanSittart wedding.

She alone knew that the vain fool had stupidly imagined that Elaine Willoughby only urged on his marriage in order to be able later to cloak an intimacy which would have later made Justine's fortune.

And now, she would not be balked out of the harvest of fortune. For an hour, the ardent Vreeland pleaded with the artful woman. Her bold eyes, dulled with the bistre stains, gleamed with triumph as he pleaded with her.

The elegant young man alternately flattered and caressed the brown-faced *intrigante*, whose coarse beauty had long been the toast of the *cabaret* which she yearned to possess in Paris.

Her voluptuous bosom and heavy haunches were the antipodes of Vreeland's beauty ideal, and yet, he knelt to flatter and to sue. For she alone could spy upon the most sacred privacy of the woman he had sworn to rule.

Justine eyed him keenly, and spoke at last. "Give me a thousand dollars and promise that you will give me a free hand if you marry Madame," she said, as she yielded to his self-abusing pleadings.

"And only you shall know her secrets. I hate that Doctor!" she cried. "I can find out all you want to know, but; you must do as I wish." Her velvet eyes gleamed in a fierce flame.

"Listen, Justine," urged Vreeland. "To-morrow I will bring you a thousand dollars when I come to the Circassia. Tell me now what you can; I swear to make you rich if you will only stand by me. It is Sunday," he added. "No banks are open to-day. This first hundred will not count."

And he thrust a bill into her brown hand.

"I have watched for years to find the secret of her past life," promptly said the sly Justine, drawing nearer to Vreeland. "I, too, thought of an *affaire*. It is not. But, *a secret there is*, and only one man knows—the old lawyer. I hid myself near them on his last visit, for they talked long, and Madame fell down fainting after he had gone away.

"Their talk was of the old times, and it is always so, when they come to that. But, *this time* I listened carefully while she moaned in her sorrow."

"And she said?" anxiously cried Vreeland.

"*'My child! My child! Give me back my child!'*" she cried. And so there is a child, and *it is not of the Senator! Voila! They are stupidement placide toujours! Les affaires! Only—ze monnaie!* She loves him not. And only the old man knows. You shall watch him and her."

A sudden suspicion of a feminine double life brought a name to Vreeland's lips.



"Hathorn!" he said, with a meaning look at his partner in an already vicious intrigue. For Justine Duprez knew him in all the pliant baseness of his real nature, and they had groveled toward each other from the very first.

The Parisian gamine laughed a bitter, hard laugh.

"I have been at Madame's side since the first day when this egoist Hathorn first met her. There has been no love, no intrigue, no child. And he—the hard-hearted brute—schemed only for her money.

"No! It is beyond me. Beyond my seven years of service. I will reach *la mystère* yet for you," she smiled. "And you will perhaps find that there was ze old divorce, ze old-time *scandale*. And the other man, the husband, has perhaps taken away the child. The sorrow, *yes*; the secret *d'amour*, *no*! *Elle est trop bravement bête pour l'amour à la mode*.

The journalist? Ah, no! *Il n'est qu'un brave ami! Pas plus!*" It was dark before the "rising star" dared to steal away from Justine's little *pied à terre*, for too well Vreeland knew that the enraged Hathorn was shadowing his every movement.

Justine had fled away, light-hearted, after the sealing of a pact which was to lead her to the splendors of *Dame du Comptoir* of her own *cabaret*. And as Vreeland strolled homeward he summed up the situation.

"Her only friend and confidant is Endicott. No thoroughfare there. Alberg, this German brute, knows nothing and Hathorn less than nothing, or he would have already used it against her in this bitter petticoat fight.

"I will hoodwink them all. My time will come when I have gained her cherished secret. And if I do gain

her secret, it will be on the market, to the highest bidder, perhaps to the dashing Alida Hathorn, or else be quietly nursed to later bring me in a fortune." He was satisfied with his day's work. The light was dawning now.

When the adventurer reviewed the whole situation, he felt that the mystery was as yet hidden in Elaine Willoughby's ardent bosom. "The day will come when she will need me, when she will tell me all, when she is safe to live a free woman's heart-life. I will wait on her and give no one my confidence."

During the long, busy week before the Christmas holidays, Vreeland narrowly watched his strange, silent partner, Horton Wyman, to see if he were bidden to the Lakemere house party.

"He is the only one that I have to fear," mused Vreeland, "for, with Senator Alynton's backing and his daily intercourse with old Endicott, I would be bowled out in a moment, if I made a single misstep. Can he yearn for Elaine Willoughby's money?"

In the daily office associations, the casual meetings at the Circassia, in the feebly maintained exchange of personal hospitalities, Horton Wyman had so far remained to him an unexplored country.

Cool, sturdy, with piercing black eyes, and a marvelous self-control, with a facial mask which even a Jesuit might have envied, Horton Wyman was seemingly devoid of any passion but money-making.

Vreeland had gained the general impression that he was "bookish," and the silent partner avoided all show society.

Thirty-five years sat lightly on the man, whose scanty references to Senator Alynton's millionaire

father indicated that the "poor relation," had been trained up in adversity as the dead financier's private secretary. "He is a fellow to beware of. I'll let him alone," mused Vreeland.

Harold Vreeland thanked his lucky stars when Wyman drew him into his private den when the first sporadic Christmas trees were beginning to creep into Gotham.

"Well, old man," cheerfully said Wyman, "I'm off for a two weeks' visit to the Alyntons. Endicott will handle our Board work through his uncle's private broker, and Maitland and Noel will take their leave after we return. I suppose that you will be at the Lakemere house party.

"Of course, there's no need of you following up things at the office. Here's my telegraph address, if anything turns up, and, of course, Mrs. Willoughby will call on you if she needs anything.

"We've got the thing running pretty smoothly, so take your full share of mistletoe. Noel tells me that all the prettiest girls in town will be up there at Lakemere." It was a welcome relief.

"I have now a free field," jubilantly exclaimed Vreeland. "He is as indifferent to her as if she were only a cloak model. *Now, for Lakemere!*"

Vreeland never stopped in his trickery to be ashamed of his low truckling with the French maid, whose malleable conscience was at his disposal, in the hopes of much future backsheesh.

And so the adroit Continental Doctor had now two false friends between him and the woman who was his "star patient" and whom he, too, intended for an innocent dupe. The fate of every rich and lonely woman!

It was under the Christmas tree at Lakemere that Harold Vreeland learned for the first time why the Queen of the Street had held him for months in a glittering quiescence in the rapidly built-up firm.

The merry guests were already assembled on the other side of the curtain when the breathless Justine drew Vreeland into a dark corner.

The French woman's panting bosom heaved as she whispered: "She wants to see you in there, first of all. Now is your time, but don't forget me, Harold."

There was the pledge of an infamous pact in the meeting of their guilty eyes. Justine now stood, with flaming sword, between her secret lover and those who would approach the woman who held both their fortunes. Her dark fidelity was doubly bought.

It was a robed queen who stood waiting there by the fragrant Christmas tree and held both her hands out to Harold Vreeland. The Lady of Lakemere at her very best!

With beaming eyes, she handed him an envelope and whispered: "The time has now come when you will have your own part to play, under my sole orders.

"I know your whole record. You have been my own faithful knight.

"Listen! All these merry-makers will go away with the old year. Judge Endicott brings me the firm's settlement papers on New Years. I will then send for you and make you my secret representative in a momentous affair.

"To protect my interests you must at once leave the Waldorf.

"Trust to me!" she smiled. "I will have your bachelor apartments ready. And no one, not even Wyman, must ever learn of your 'secret service.'

Silence and obedience, and your fortune is assured. You alone shall battle for me and drive this fool Hathorn forever from the Street.

"Go now! You will leave with the first departing guests, but await my telegram at the Waldorf to come to me here. And so, I have your plighted word. Never a whisper to a living soul. You are to be still only the office partner—to the world!"

Vreeland snatched her trembling hand and kissed it. It was burning in fever.

But he sped away, and before the curtain rose to a chorus of happy laughter and shouts of delighted surprise, a glance in a corner of the hallway where Justine awaited him showed him a check for twenty-five thousand dollars as his Christmas gift. His patroness had handed him the precious envelope in silence.

In a low whisper he opened the gates of paradise to the French woman, who watched her lover with flaming eyes. "Five thousand dollars of this to you, if you find out for me the secret of that child."

And he left her, panting with the thrill of a sated avarice.

"I will go through fire and water to serve you," she faltered. "I will steal the secret from her midnight dreams."

That night, after the gay dances were done, when the house was stilled, Elaine Willoughby sat before her fire, while Justine laid away the regal robes.

There was the glitter of diamonds and the shimmer of pearls everywhere. With her hands clasped, the lonely mistress of Lakemere gazed into the dancing flames.

"I must crush him—to leave the past buried—that



I may yet find the path trodden by those little wandering feet.

"Ah, my God!" she moaned, "it is not revenge that I want. It is love—*her love*—I burn to know her mine alone. And the past shall be kept as a sealed book, for her dear sake. It must be so. It is the only way. For, Vreeland is brave and true!"

The handsome hypocrite was even then dreaming of a "double event," a duplicated prize, one beyond his wildest hopes.

"By heaven! I'll have both her and the fortune!" His busy, familiar devil "laughed by his side."

## BOOK II—WITH THE CURRENT.

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### CHAPTER VI.

#### IN THE "ELMLEAF" BACHELOR APARTMENTS.

Mr. Harold Vreeland silently wondered at the protean character of womanhood as he watched Mrs. Elaine Willoughby's almost feverish gaiety in the few days which followed their new relation. "I can believe anything of a woman's subtle arts after this," he wonderingly said, as he made himself a graceful factor in the joys under holly and mistletoe.

Not a single reference to the coming business had ever escaped her, and she was as merrily impartial in her favors as a girl at her first ball.

There was hardly a financier in the house party, Noel Endicott's visit of a day being a mere duty call. "She evidently wishes to hide our intimacy from all, and to publicly impress only the social character on our friendship," mused Vreeland.

"Lady mine! you are a deep one!" he mused. Never had he been placed next to her at dinner, and even at the cotillion's trifling favors she had only sought him among the very last.

He was aware that all New York knew of how Hathorn had been coached up by her into financial glory. "That mistake she will not repeat. It's a case of blood and the secret warpath, now," reflected Vreeland.

But with the check for twenty-five thousand dollars in his pocket, he felt that his silence was paid for in advance. He was swimming gaily on with the current now.

He had calmed Dr. Hugo Alberg down into an expectant friendship by agreeing to dine with him once a week and to exchange regular reports at Martin's.

"So far, I have found out nothing, Doctor," said the lying Vreeland; "but I have written out West. I understand that she has immense properties in Colorado. If I get a clew, you and I will work it up together.

"In the meantime watch over her yourself, and then tell me all."

Alberg was in high glee at his social début, and confided to Vreeland that their patroness was in the most brilliant health.

"*Well,*" good-humoredly answered Vreeland, "between you and me we will manage to guard her and take care of her property, if she will only let us."

The miserly German's eyes gleamed as they drank to their private pact.

"The great thing is to keep every one else away from her," whispered Alberg. "I of course watch her professionally. You must keep off all those society sharks like that upstart Hathorn."

"Trust to me. I know my business," laughed Vreeland.

When Vreeland left Lakemere on the last day of the old year, his only reminder was the whispered word, "Remember!"

"I will wait at the Waldorf," he answered, with a last meaning gleam in his eyes.

Standing now on an almost secure pedestal, Vree-

land never dared to dream of the sentimental approach upon the woman who was now the sole arbiter of his destiny.

"That would be the clumsiest mistake of all," he decided. "Only—when she comes into the net—I will tighten it."

He well knew that the bachelor apartment was to be the scene of some veiled financial strategy and not a rosy Paphian bower.

Mean and low at heart as he was, he knew that her soul towered above all low deceit, as the rosy Jungfrau lifts its unsullied peaks to the blue skies.

The one rare virtue of this scoundrel in embryo was that no inane self-conceit clouded his clear and mercilessly direct reasoning.

"I am only her tool as yet," he reflected.

"But the Endicotts, Aubrey Maitland, and Wyman are to know nothing! This, of course, excludes Senator Alynton.. She trusts me then *alone*—of the whole world." And so, he panted for the coming solution of the enigma.

As he departed for New York, he left one lynx-eyed aid behind him.

It was the hot-hearted Justine, who already knew what her *étrennes* would be—a second thousand dollars.

"Remember, my own Justine," he urged, with glowing eyes, "I want you to earn that whole five thousand dollars. Spy on Alberg.

"He is only a fool. But catch every whisper of this wary old Endicott. He alone knows what you must learn. There lies your fortune—in those pretty ears."

"I have made my plan," smilingly whispered the brown-skinned maid. "I am going to earn that money. Remember, I am *vraie Française!*"

There were but two plausible explanations of Madonna's strangely secret course. Some "deed without a name" was in the plot.

And none of her old friends, no one of the financial world, not even her advisers, tried and true, were to share the secret of the two for whom the "bachelor apartment" was to be the veiled headquarters.

"Either Hathorn has surprised the secret of her early life and spirited away her child, hoping to have drawn her down to his will, or—can it be that she means to sell out the sugar syndicate?"

He gazed reflectively at the winter landscape flying by, as he pondered over the first. "*No!*" was his correct deduction. "Hathorn is powerless. He would surely have held on to her business, by fear or force, and gained the inside track in the great gamble, Sugar.

"He would have bent her to his will, and carried on the old hideous gilded sin—to make his light o' love his young wife's best friend.

"That's quite *fin de siècle* in New York, they tell me.

"His crime was only the bull-headed folly of preferring another and a younger woman to the one woman whom he could have gratefully and logically married.

"There is a man's fatuous vanity to look for her support in chasing down a younger and prettier rival under her very eyes. And yet, she hastened on the marriage. By Jove! she did. It's a mystery to me!"

The puzzled schemer never knew of the real foundation of his own blossoming fortunes.

The lightning flashes of Elaine Willoughby's mad anger came when Judge Endicott had found out that Frederick Hathorn was secretly shadowing his loving



and trusting employer and tracing back her past life. Then, Elaine Willoughby became a wolf on the trail.

All of social life is but a hoodman blind game. The stern old lawyer was only carrying out a secret quest, and he could not divine that Hathorn's real object was to trace down to a direct connection Elaine Willoughby's secret alliance with the heads of the great Sugar Trust. It was but a mean money greed, after all.

Keenly alive to every pointer of the Street, Hathorn had not learned, for all his five years of florid devotion, that his lovely patroness had sealed that one treasured secret in her soul. And, meanly, he had tried to dig under her mines. But it was the thirst for gold alone that fired his veins.

Hiram Endicott alone knew of the coolly-devised scheme by which the woman whom he had deceived had made Hathorn's marriage and enforced absence the epoch for a complete break-off of all business relations.

But she, deluded, as even the keenest mortals are, in stocks, love, or war, only feared for the one darling secret of her heart—that veiled sorrow which lay behind Hiram Endicott's useless search of years.

And in the defense of that one pure and unsullied memory, she would have torn herself from Hathorn's arms even at the altar. For there is a love which can tear the face of any man from a true woman's heart—the mother love.

Before Harold Vreeland reached New York he had decided upon the "Sugar speculations" as the secret reason for setting up the "bachelor apartment."

It was now a matter of gossip on the Street that the great Standard Oil Company was reaching its octopus

arms out for "safe investments," as well as sure new speculative fields.

To use a huge surplus of idle money and an inexhaustible credit, it was rumored that they proposed to sneak into a quiet mastery of the American Sugar Refinery Company's outside stock, and even in time to gather in all the great Gas monopolies of Manhattan Island.

"*That's my lady's game!*" gleefully cried Vreeland. "She could crush Hathorn at will. Their business is ruined. The ugly rumors as to his shabby behavior to her have hurt that firm.

"And Potter, too, is about to draw out. Wolfe has no money to speak of. 'Missie VanSittart' will not pay her husband's stock losses, not she."

Harold Vreeland grinned, for the young woman's name was even now lightly bandied by the club jackals, but only *sotto voce*, in deference to her social rank.

"That's her little game! She dares not let Alýnton know that she proposes to dally with the other side in this coming fight of giants.

"She proposes to 'copper' the game of 'more sweetness and light,' as well as play it for a sure winner.

"And I am to be her *left hand*, and the *right* (our firm) is to be ignorant of what the left doeth!"

He was well aware that in some way she was always early possessed of all the Sugar Syndicate secrets. Whether Endicott, Alynton, the statesman, or Conyers was her coach, he knew not.

"Perhaps all three—the law, the senate, and journalism," he grinned.

"Or, is she going to betray these people to the newcomers? There would be enormous profits in that 'sweet surrender.'

"I shall enjoy the run, and be in at the death," he gaily cried, as he sought his hotel in a vastly enhanced good humor.

When he entered the Waldorf, a sudden encounter made him think that angels of light had invaded the crepuscular gloom of the long hall in the early winter evening.

He scarcely credited his senses when Mrs. Frederick Hathorn motioned him to a corner of the Turkish room, after his startled but gravely polite salute.

The lady was a ravishing example of the "survival of the fittest" in the line of Worth, Pingât, and Redfern.

With a wave of her slender hand she swept away the flood of easy lies that were trembling on his lips, and then, her bright eyes, deep and searching, seemed to delve into his very soul.

"Remember, you need not answer, if you don't care to; but you must give me the right to feel that you are a gentleman. My husband's enemies *may* or *may not* be mine!" She burned a Parthian glance into his trembling heart.

"Why did you conceal from him that you were going into banking, and let him go on and parade you as his best friend, and all that?" she curtly demanded.

"Mrs. Hathorn," earnestly pleaded the accomplished liar, "another man had my promise of partnership long before I left Montana. He was already making arrangements as to offices and several confidential matters on which our firm's future depended.

"I was only asked to give your husband an answer on October 1st.

"And I did give one early enough—a friendly declination—which your husband made me repeat too

forcibly. You should not blame me for our little estrangement."

"And you did not scheme to supplant him with—with—"

"One word, Madame," meaningly said Vreeland. "I have opened my heart to you. *Noblesse oblige!* Your question was one I could honorably answer, just as I could *not* honorably forewarn men whom fate had made our business rivals.

"Remember, all's fair in love, stocks, and war. And it's every man for himself in New York."

"And every woman, too," added Mrs. Alida, with a little snaky smile.

"I always liked you," she hesitatingly said, and then, her eyes dropped before the ardent and merciless gaze of a man who now saw "a new way to pay old debts."

"Then let me volunteer a hint that I have never supplanted your husband with anyone nor sought to. My capital alone gives me weight in our firm. I have never even opened a ledger or made an individual transaction.

"Pride and old comradeship should temper each other in your husband. I have only avoided the distressing embarrassments which he alone has brought upon himself, and you will always find me your secret friend, though I can not seek you out in this witches' parade of Gotham. You know all the reasons why I can not range myself openly at your side." His devilish familiar was now whispering in his ear.

The victim was young, fair, and foolish.

The luxurious woman sighed. All her allures had been baffled.

"*If I should need to tax your friendship?*" she slowly said, her breathing quick and fierce, telling of her agitation.

It was now Vreeland's eyes which "burned into her spirit's core."

"Yes; if you make the place where we can meet without a foolish risk and placing us both in a false position."

He glanced around the debatable ground of the Turkish room. Any notable, from Chauncey Depew down to the last "Western bonanza beauty," might surprise them there at any moment.

"Will you come, if you need me?" he whispered, taking her hand, with insidious suggestion.

"*Perhaps,*" she faltered, with pale and trembling lips, and when he looked up he was alone, but a knot of lilies of the valley from her corsage lay in his hand.

He dreamed strange dreams that night, for he well knew of the seraglio secrets of the bachelor apartments of New York.

He knew the light vanity that might lead her feet to the "Castle Dangerous" to solve the riddle which was as yet a mystery to himself.

But he whistled "*Donna è Mobile*" very contentedly, as he awoke to find a telegram on New Year's morning from his sly partner in an already plotted treason. Justine's words were pithy, and Justine was on guard.

"*Watch in South Fifth Avenue for news!*"

The simple signature J followed the words: "*Lawyer here. See me first on your arrival.*"

"I think that I am a pretty lucky devil," was the flattering unction with which Vreeland regaled his



soul, as he drove down to Wall Street and found the two responsible men there on duty.

Noel Endicott, with Aubrey Maitland, were in a secret junta busily opening the new set of books.

The finely assumed carelessness of Vreeland covered his desire to trace and locate the only man he feared—Mr. Horton Wyman.

"Just write your dispatch," calmly said Endicott. "I'll send it down to Washington to Alynton's private secretary, and you'll have Wyman's answer at once. They are inspecting some of Alynton's West Virginia properties."

And, in truth, an open answer to Vreeland's holiday greeting was at the Waldorf when the schemer finished his New Year's dinner, and slipped out to visit the lair where a wrinkled hag guarded Justine Duprez' convenient *piéd à terre*.

He marveled long over a second dispatch which awaited him there. Its words were ominous, and yet, Elaine Willoughby was firm and steadfast in her purpose.

"She has been greatly excited. Doctor Alberg has been telegraphed for. You are to come to-morrow. Lawyer leaves to-night. Dare not communicate by letter. I have the most important news."

And all night Harold Vreeland was tossed about in a vain unrest.

He knew that his greedy accomplice Justine would easily handle and draw out Alberg, for, not of a jealous disposition, Vreeland was perfectly willing that the doctor should be made a tool of the facile Parisienne.

"You know how to lead him on, Justine," was Vreeland's easy-going hint, whereat the demure maid

dropped her lashes and smiled. And after all, even the artful Justine was only means to an end.

The recurring excitement of the tortured lonely rich woman was only a new phase of the old invincible mystery. "Can it be a gigantic game of blackmail, the infamous price of someone's silence—the bribe to her quiet enjoyment of a station not her own? What hideous Frankenstein hides behind the dropped arras of her life?"

Vreeland knew how many dark shadows lurked behind the bright curtains of New York's Belgravia and Mayfair.

"By God! I shall know soon!" he growled, as the second day of the new year brought him the dispatch confirming Justine's watchful foresight. There was no uncertain ring to the words of the Lady of Lake-mere.

"Come to me at once! Immediate action necessary!"

"It seems to be something recurrent—something, too, that even golden-massed money can not help! She would quickly brush this trouble away, if the 'long green' would do it. And, it must be something which that old fox, Endicott, can not help, or he would stay up there on guard and help it, instead of leaving her to Dr. Hugo Alberg's chloral, chlorodyne, and phenacetine. There must be an ugly snarl—some olden shame, some hidden disgrace."

Vreeland very well knew that the sly German practitioner's drugs had brought his patient "no surcease of sorrow," but only "pushed the clouds along" to a new day of reactionary misery. For, the proud heart was sealed and yet surcharged almost to its breaking.

"I wonder what our opinion of each other would be

if we all had to walk abroad with our life stories openly branded on our faces?" mused the anxious Vreeland, as he drove away to the station. The flying wheels of the coupé seemed to clatter "Not much! Not much! Nothing at all!" He meanly believed all men and women to be as base at heart as himself.

"Thank Fortune for the decent lies of a smooth appearance and a still tongue!" was the schemer's cheering conclusion, as he finally dismissed all vain moralizing, and then, wondered how he would meet the crafty Justine first, and so be able to gain her budget of stolen tidings before he faced the watchful Lady of Lakemere.

The provokingly suggestive face of the French woman met him at the front door, on his arrival. "I am to see that you have your breakfast," she smilingly said, "while Doctor Alberg, now upstairs, prepares Madame for your visit!"

And, as she drew him into a coign of vantage, she whispered, "He is now my very slave! For he, too, is hunting for an ally, and I had him all to myself last evening! Now for the news! You can afford to be liberal to me!"

Her eyes were beaming with that vicious triumph of an unfaithful underling discovering the naked soul of her helpless mistress.

The household traitor is the lowest of all human spawn.

"Tell me everything," was Vreeland's hurried response. "When I marry her, I will be the King of the Street, and you shall stay with us as long as you wish—it will be always the same between us."

The woman's gleaming eyes softened in a glow of triumph.

"And, your house at Paris shall be my *pied à terre*. But, give me every word—remember!"

His bosom was rent with thronging hopes and fears.

Justine smiled, as she pressed herself close to the handsome scoundrel.

"It is a bargain, then. I will hold you to every word, and I will never let you go. How I secreted myself so as to hear them, is my own business. But I did. In their fear of Doctor Alberg, whom Endicott heartily despises, they fell easily into my hands. There was much talk of the child—a girl—a missing girl—her child—but no time or age was given—no whisper of the father's name."

Justine paused, while Vreeland hoarsely whispered, "Go on! Go on! Quick! She may send any moment for me, now!"

"It appears she had placed her child, to get rid of it, in a 'private Orphan Asylum' here, in the city. Just why—I can not tell. But, they have lost all traces of the girl.

"The old man said, 'I have followed up every "private inquiry" possible, since your orders of last summer. These detective fellows all come to me for their money on the New Year. Now you must be brave, Elaine,' he said, and I could hear her choking sobs.

" 'I have very bad news.'

" 'She is dead?' almost screamed Madame.

"From my little peep-hole, I could see the old lawyer take her hands.

" 'We have been led away on a blind trail. And I have only just now found the right one—but to lose it forever, I fear. For one of my best agents has discovered that Doctor McLloyd's private Orphan Asylum

was chased out of New York City by some angry rivals, and a bevy of too inquisitive reporters.

“The Doctor was making money too fast, and there was a very suspicious mortality among the little girls. It reappeared as the “House of the Good Samaritan,” at a little village in Westchester County. The old Doctor has gone either to his reward, or punishment. Probably, the latter.

“But the sly hypocrite who sported a D.D., as well as a medical title, left the Westchester property to a buxom grass widow, who long officiated as his matron.

“This woman is now forty years old—well-to-do—and is married to a thrifty young farmer—a man who is not particular as to how she earned the handsome property which they enjoy.’

“Mrs. Willoughby was softly sobbing when he finished.

“By the lavish use of money and a compact of immunity, she agreed to privately examine the books and records. Of course *she has not got them*. “It is a friend—and so on.” We did not dare to force her. For, she is a very sly bird.

“She was only twenty-two when she eased the good Doctor’s lonely hours, and she is a remarkably cool hand at the game of life.’

“The old man sighed, as he said, ‘It appears that the enthusiastic childless woman, who first adopted the child, died in two years after your babe was taken away from the “private Orphan Asylum,” and, as her young husband remarried in a year, he brought the pretty child back and left her again on McLloyd’s hands—with a handsome present.

“The girl was a beautiful three-year-old fairy, and the “matron” remembers her especially. But, McLloyd,



always anxious for profit, gave her to the first decent applicants, a respectable childless couple, from Western New York.

“‘Under the name of “Alva Whiting”—full orphan—she was sent away for the second time.

“‘I must find her! You must advertise!’ cried Madame.

“‘Ah!’ said the old lawyer. ‘There is no hope. The young widower came back, after his second wedding was all safe, returning from a three years’ visit in Europe. By a strange chance, his later union was also childless.

“‘Rich, and now thoroughly independent, he, too, wished to trace “Alva Whiting,” and to reclaim her.

“‘But the matron says that even the wily McLloyd, tempted by a handsome reward, failed to find her. The Western New York people may have given a false name, to prevent the child from ever knowing that she was not their own.

“‘That is all—the matron would gladly earn our offered money—she knows nothing.

“‘And now, God alone can, in his infinite mercy, ever reclaim “Alva Whiting.”

“‘I have tried to induce this woman to meet me. She flatly told my agent that she would have all the books burned—and then, deny everything—if her prosperous middle age was connected with old McLloyd’s baby farm. She cried, “I’m as fond of money as anyone—but there’s the end of it.”

“‘No more would she say. I fear there is no hope.’ The old lawyer was almost in tears, as he saw Madame’s sufferings.

“Now,” whispered Justine, “I merely saved my place by that agility of body which you have so often

praised. When Madame fell in a dead faint, and the old lawyer screamed for help, I just ran around the hall, knocking over a table, and—the rest has been left in Doctor Alberg's hands. So, you now know all." The schemer's brain was working like lightning as they parted in silence.

After the breakfast, it was Justine who conducted Vreeland to Madame Willoughby's morning room—but not until Doctor Alberg had first waylaid him.

"The same old mystery!" the German sighed.

"Money trouble it can not be."

He flourished his arm in the direction of the fortune in art and bibelots scattered around.

"Her general system is without disease. Her mind and self-control are perfect. She has no concealed bad habits, like the 'suffering New York dames,'" he sneered. "But always periodical violent storms of sorrow, these violent attacks following old Endicott's business visits.

"There must be some old bug-a-boo. Now, I know lonely women are often apt to be hysterical.

"Marry her. Take her away to Europe. Make her happy. She is a Venus de Melos, yet in her prime. Break off the domination of this old legal crab.

"Marriage reveals all secrets, finally. You will surely break his hold on her. You are no sentimentalist. I will prescribe marriage—do you see? We will work together. I will be your ally—your slave—your friend.

"You can well afford to be generous, and you then can work me in, as confidential physician, into that golden New York circle where the women's confidence once gained, a man need not look further for a Golconda.

"Discretion, silence, and a willingness to go through fire to hide any woman's secrets—*voilà*—the perfect doctor—the successful medical man! Shall we work together—you and I?"

The young schemer grasped the greedy German's hand. "I'll stop at nothing—to help you. By God! you shall have her every secret."

"It's a go. Loyal to the end," whispered Vreeland.

"And you and I breakfast at Martin's every Sunday till I am a happy bridegroom."

The alert physician glided away to where Justine Duprez's eyes called him, with their velvety lure.

Harold Vreeland's face was lit up with a tender sympathy, as he knelt before the fair woman who lay in a *chaise longue* before her superbly sculptured fireplace. There was a surprise in store for "the knight of the ribbon blue." His patroness' face was stoically calm. She was no hysterical weakling!

With a perfect self-possession, she plunged at once into the "business in hand."

"A modern mystery," he murmured. "A sphinx of the heart," for Elaine Willoughby, Napoleon-like, ignored her ailments, whether of a mere passing weakness or "memory's rooted sorrow." And at what secret cost?

"Time presses!" she said. "Follow my every word. For, I have sent them all away. There is only Doctor Alberg in the house—and Justine always keeps him in her eye."

Vreeland breathed hard. It dawned upon him that the universally pliant French woman was in the receipt of several salaries.

"She is a smart devil," he thought, with a glow of pride.

"I shall have to travel some, this spring—in connection with very important movements and reactions of a specialty in the stock market, which you alone will know of.

"You and I must be the only ones to handle the concealed intimacy of ours. Not even Endicott suspects.

"He never must. No one in the firm. Should foul play or awkwardness reveal it, the firm name of Wyman & Vreeland would come down in a day. So, mark my every word. I will not return to New York till you are installed in your new apartments in the Elmleaf.

"It is well located, in the 'thirties'—I have taken the best one on the top floor to aid you in the gay and showy life that I wish you to lead there.

"You will find your new man, Bagley, a veteran London valet, just brought over, waiting to report to you now at the Waldorf. He has never been in America before, and none of our opponents know him. I had Justine engage him through Low's Exchange.

"The rooms are already decorated and arranged for you. They have been ready for a month, and no one can ever trace the ownership. The whole belongings are yours."

Vreeland found a voice. He began his grateful praise.

She smiled faintly. "Nay! no thanks! It is purely a business matter. If you wish anything else, give a list to me. I will transmit it to the furnisher, who will at once provide. There will be no bills. I hope that the rooms will please you. Of course, I shall never see them."

The young would-be bridegroom noted the cold

dignity of her measured sentences. There was the thin icy rivulet still between them.

"Mark me now," she said. "There is a working room, and a private secretary (a stenographer, typewriter, and telegraph operator) will attend daily, from nine until six. The telegraph and private telephone wire are connected with my rooms in the 'Circassia.' There is a duplicate 'phone joining you with 'Central,' for your social use." Vreeland began to take his cue.

"From the café in the Elmleaf, you can have morning service, and be furnished such entertainment as you may wish to give. I presume that you dine at your clubs, or in society. The café accounts will all come to me."

She paused, and studied Vreeland's face closely.

"And, in all this, what am I to do?" he asked bewildered.

The Lady of Lakemere laughed gaily at his embarrassment.

"You are to move in there, at once. Sign the lease for a year. Bagley will take charge of you. There you are to give a jolly house-warming. Call up all your friends. Do not neglect Merriman, Wiltshire, and Rutherford. You are to be pretty gay. These gentlemen may even bring some of the ladies who wear diamond garter buckles. So much the better!

"When I return to New York, you are to report to me at the 'Circassia,' and the serious business of your new life will then begin. The woman whom I will send to you as secretary is thoroughly reliable, and I will answer for her fidelity."

"The woman?" babbled the astounded Vreeland.

"Yes! Miss Mary Kelly—a talented young business



woman of perfect accomplishment, who represents me." The voice of the lady was cuttingly clear.

"Her slight lameness alone prevents her being placed in some position of the greatest trust. That room only is sacred from all of your rattle-headed social friends. I trust her implicitly."

"I begin to understand you," gravely said Vreeland.

"Under the guise of enjoying my life and living up to my prosperity, I am to hide the momentous secret stock business carried on there."

"Precisely," soberly said Elaine Willoughby.

"The office business below?" he hesitatingly said.

"Ah! I have given up months to the study of this new arrangement," thoughtfully said the Queen of the Street. "You are to be master of your own hours.

"Once a day, however, you are to show up at the downtown office. Wyman knows that you will be busied at home a great deal. You will have no awkward questions asked. Endicott will watch the downtown affair."

"The firm signature?" he said.

"Will never be used. You will sign 'Harold Vreeland, Trustee,' and the securities handled daily will be delivered to me at the 'Circassia,' on my list of purchases and sales. Your checks and my daily statements are to correspond."

"In other words, I am, as trustee, your hidden broker?" Vreeland said.

"Under my daily orders," she gravely answered. "And you are not to deny that you indulge in private speculations. You are not even to avoid Hathorn's nearest friends.

"Even if Mrs. Volney McMorris should steal into your breakfast room, or a bevy of the gay young matrons, or—even a pretty anonyma—your record as a '*preux chevalier*' in gayest New York will not suffer. You are to be a young man *à la mode*." Vreeland bowed in a grave silence.

That night, when he returned to New York City, to blindly obey his strange patroness, Vreeland's bosom was big with his happy secrets.

"I am to hold the hidden fort 'of the Sugar treasure.' "

He divined a bitter campaign against Hathorn. And he then dreamed a strange, sweet, wicked dream. Alida Hathorn's stolen visits—with Justine, perhaps—as a dark-eyed devil laughing over the downfall of his enemy's wife.

"I will make my own little game," he laughed.

## CHAPTER VII.

## "PLUNGER" VREELAND'S GAY LIFE, "UNDER THE ROSE."

Before the February snows were congealed into those dirty flakes of ice and street mud which are an evidence of the "effectiveness" of New York's Street Cleaning department, the "top floor" of the Elmleaf bachelor apartment was considered to set the pace for the gayest of the bachelor apartments of Gotham. The hidden programme was even literally carried out.

Outwardly, the daily life of that fortunate individual, Mr. Harold Vreeland, had undergone little change. Once a day he duly occupied his desk at the downtown office, using alternately the morning and afternoon fraction.

He proved a very "tough nut to crack" for the local gossips, however. There was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde flavor of mystery clinging to the audacious young "Westerner." The slow trots of the "Locust" and the old senile wiseacres of the "Sentinel" clubs wondered at his calm demeanor, his easily acquired repose of the caste of "Vere de Vere." Vreeland was posing now as a "fixed star."

Not even Bradstreet, or Dun, could seize upon any public delinquencies to the detriment of his "business character," and yet, Harold Vreeland had rapidly acquired the reputation of a "devil of a fellow." He had, like Byron, his "hours of idleness."

There was, too, an outward prosperous harmony in

the busy office of Wyman and Vreeland, now packed with clerks and forging to the front as a house of unexampled strength.

There was a sober, quiet effectiveness in the firm, which shamed the nervous "bucket shop" decadents, who were only noisy, screaming gulls, clamoring over the financial sea for "any old thing" in the way of floating pabulum.

It was undeniable that the hats went off to right and left, as Vreeland paced the sacred precincts of Wall, Broad and Pine. A rising man—a successful man—a man of mark!

"A safe man, sir! A wonderful young financier! A man whose outside operations are enormous!" gravely said the cashier of the Mineralogical Bank to his esteemed colleague, the cashier of Henry Screws & Company.

"You see!" confidentially said the speaker, between two mouthfuls of "hasty lunch," "the house is bound not to speculate, but—Vreeland, as an individual, is to-day, perhaps the heaviest single operator of all the young men of New York." The young man's fame was duly noised abroad.

"Where does he get all his backing?" grunted the other, as he dashed down a tankard of "bitter."

"He owns the half of Montana," dreamily said the Mineralogical's Cerberus.

"And so, he is founded on the eternal rocks."

It was not half an hour until this brilliant new canard was traveling like a winged locust—and, it soon achieved the voyage—even to the jungles of Harlem—and spread all over Gotham like the Canada thistle attacking a poorhouse farm. A new financial Napoleon had appeared.

The self-possessed Vreeland was astounded at the many offered social honors, the crowding attractive business temptations, and all the rosy lures now thronging his pathway. He knew not as yet the whole force of a lie "well stuck to," which often treads down the modest and shamefaced truth.

And even the agnostic sneer of "parvenu" was spared him. He was suave, careful, chary in making enemies, and strictly non-committal.

His conduct toward Elaine Willoughby absolutely disarmed even that vigilant social scavenger, Mrs. Volney McMorris.

For, many other men were just as often seen on parade in Elaine's opera box. Senator Alynton, General Morehouse, U. S. A., Judge Arbuckle, and other social heavy guns oftener pressed the cushions of her victoria, or nestled under her sleigh robes.

The Lady of Lakemere's dinners were always stocked with a half dozen masculine "lions" of deep-toned and majestic growl. There were also two or three society swells—"howling swells"—who represented the "froth and foam," and these young men, with vacuous smiles and heaven-kissing collars, impartially formed the "bodyguard" at theatre parties, and a gilded Spartan band, deftly "cleaned up" the debris of the midnight spread in the Waldorf supper room.

Elaine had a peculiar fashion of segregating the lions and dudes, and sending each kind of social animal forth radiant with self-satisfaction, after a happy five minutes passed with her alone—in the pearl boudoir.

So, calm and serene, Harold Vreeland duly came and went. Men wondered that he so freely stood back to let "other fellows take up the running," and



Augustus Van Renslayer sagely summed up the verdict of the younger "women hunters" of New York: "He is no marrying man. He lives in an eternal picnic of his own—up there—in the Elmleaf." It was vaguely understood that Sardanapalus was Vreeland's patron saint, and Bacchus and Nero his household gods. The charm had worked but too well.

And the women of Gotham, those bright-eyed heart-wreckers, were all fain to agree with the catfish-eyed Van Renslayer. There was a fatal impartiality in the easy gallantry of the wary Princeton graduate.

Liberal, dashing, mindful of all the *petits agremens*, he was no woman's slave—and yet, all women's friend. If no single heart quivered at his master touch, still, there were many arms open to him *selon son métier*. A fatal curiosity led many a pretty Columbus on voyages of discovery to the Elmleaf—whereat Bagley duly grinned.

That famous housewarming had been a marvel in its delicate recognition of the *monde ou l'on s'ennuie*, and the judicious hilarity of the Demi-Vierges.

For the return of Mr. James Potter, now finally severed from the flagging firm of Hathorn & Wolfe, had furnished Vreeland with a brilliant new idea.

There was a superb "First Part," in which Mrs. Volney McMorris lightly and amiably matronized the bravest ladies of the "swim"—who had long been burning to inspect the splendors of the upper floor of the Elmleaf.

Among the forty guests of the "official" programme, were such undeniably good form clubmen as Potter, Wiltshire, Merriman, and Rutherfordstone. They and their gilded brothers suggested the names of willing goddesses, and so it was that Miss Katharine

VanDyke Norreys, the "staccato" Californian heiress—Mrs. Murray Renton, of Cleveland—and several other detached, semi-detached, and detachable women "of spotless reputation," joyed with the host's convives, dipped their laughing, rosy lips in his Roederer, and pattered with their lightly-treading feet over his airy domain of a wondrously refined luxury.

It was nearly one o'clock when the grave Bagley had closed the last carriage door and sent the two policemen away with "a heavenly smile on their faces"—and a five-dollar bill clutched in each brawny hand.

And then, on softly-rolling rubber wheels, came slipping along under the shadows of clubhouse and virtuous mansions of drowsy decorum, the pick of Cupid's Dashing Free Lances—the very flower of the Light Infantry of Love. This "Pickett's charge" of these demure Demi-Vierges was successful.

It was the solemn Bagley who marveled as he sped these "shining ones" on their way up the stair at the struggling odors of "Y'lang Y'lang," "Atkinson's White Rose," "Wood Violets," and "Peau d'Espagne."

For days, that scented staircase recalled the "informal visit" of the regent moon, Miss Dickie Doubleday; the audacious Tottie Thistledown, the fair queen of light heels; Nannie Bell, the *mignonne chanteuse*, and several other disciples of the "partly" and, alas, the "altogether." The girdle of Venus was *en évidence* that happy night.

It is true that the glass globes automatically shrank up in affright toward the ceiling, as these flashing-eyed birds fluttered in and burst upon the gay banquet

"mid the bright bowls." The Elmleaf never sheltered a lighter-hearted crew.

It was left to the imperturbable Bagley, next day, "to gather up the fragments," and headaches, heart-aches, and visions of "woven paces and waving arms,"—with sky-pointed toes and glimpses *ne quid nimis* of clocked stockings and sleek tricots, were fairly divided among the gallant swains who "did not go home till morning."

It was in this jovial manner that Vreeland vindicated the public character of *un homme galant*, which his strange feverish-hearted patroness seemed to thrust upon him. And he wondered as he obeyed—but, the game went bravely on.

There were some seriously tender interludes in the "evening's hilarity." Miss Dickie Doubleday, in the *empanchement de son âme* and, watchfully jealous of that dimpled star, Stella Knox, had quickly effected a truce, of an amatory character, with the loved and lost Jimmie Potter, who had lived to learn that her heart was "a bicycle made for two"—if not more.

"After the ball," Potter ostentatiously lingered to smoke a last weed with Vreeland, who had opened for him alone the last unprofaned corner of his domain—that Bluebeard chamber which was "strictly business." He knew that Potter was secret, safe, and gamely silent.

"Ah! my boy!" sighed Potter. "I see how you carry on your own private plunging. What a fool Hathorn was—to quarrel with the Willoughby!

"Now that I'm out I don't mind to tell you that the old firm is going downhill very fast. Hathorn lost his luck when he cut the golden cord.

"I can't make him out. He has grown strangely reckless and haggard.

"And the wife is, to say the least, *un peu insouciant*. You know of that little yacht racket?"—and he whispered a few telling words.

"Well! Alida Hathorn was the Veiled Lady. I have it from the man who is to be the sailing master of the 'Aphrodite' next year.

"And the blinded Hathorn is obstinately shadowing Mrs. Willoughby, still following up her game, digging up her past, and backing up all his wife's acidulated slanders.

"When I found this to be a truth, and saw these damned guttersnipe Hawkshaws slipping in and out of his private office, I decided to quietly withdraw—for a quieter and a gamer woman never drew breath than Elaine Willoughby.

"I wish to God that I had married Alida," burst out the honest reveler, whose relaxed nerves had unsealed the fountains of truth. "For now, I fear, she will be every man's woman—if she don't pull up. She's left all alone, and Hathorn's one idea is revenge upon Elaine Willoughby.

"And for her sake, he bitterly hates you. Look out for him. For he has lost all self-control. You are wise to play your outside game here in safety. Hathorn would not hesitate to bribe your own people.

"I know he had that big lump of deviltry, Justine Duprez, in his pay. He even took her over to Paris the summer Mrs. Willoughby went out to Colorado. I'm glad I'm out of the stock business. You'll tire of it, and with your money why do you fool with it?"

The young Cræsus arose unsteadily, and said, "Come to breakfast with me at the Union to-morrow

—that is to say, to-day,” he chuckled. “Well, let us have one hour’s poker—you and me—and with no limit—just for fun.

“You owe me a revenge. Now, remember—I have warned you. Look out that Hathorn don’t get onto your little game—dig a pit—and drop you in it.

“He’s grown to be an ether drinker now, and his wife is as cold-hearted an egoist as breathes. Just dead gone on herself—and her own pretty bodily mechanism. If he ever gets in an ugly money corner, she won’t give him a sou marqué.

“Now, Elaine Willoughby has ‘held up her end of the log’ against some of the stiffest men in Wall Street. She is smarter than a whole stack of Hathorns. I know in the outside companies that I am director of, she has loads of the best paying permanent investments.

“And if she ever catches Hathorn nosing into her affairs, or yours, for I know your firm does a part of her business, she will smash up Fred Hathorn like the ‘Mary Powell’ going over a rowboat.”

With an affected unconcern, Vreeland saw his friend disappear in a night hour club coupé, after swearing fidelity to the poker tryst.

But his heart was beating wildly, as he crawled upstairs in the gray of the dawn. “That’s her game; defense and revenge! I wonder if Hathorn really traced her out to Colorado, and has he an inkling of Alva Whiting?

“He’s not above levying a blackmail. And I am in some strange way her pawn in this veiled duel to the death, a duel between a man and woman who may have often rested in each other’s arms with vows of deathless love.



"It may be only self-protection that made her shove him off on Alida VanSittart. How she hurried on that marriage?

"Was it jealousy, fear, or some of her craft? And I am used—used and only half trusted.

"Wait! Lady Mine! If Justine only plays me fair, I will have got all your game—and then I'll be master of you, Lakemere and the money. Once inside your lines, then you will never be able to throw me off." He was beginning to see the threads of the swift current now.

His own expression, "inside your lines," haunted him through his three hours' sleep, his bath, and early breakfast. Vreeland had the nerves of the Iron Duke, and he burned for a few words with Justine, who was to seek him that very morning, at her nest in South Fifth Avenue.

For there was a southward trip impending, and he wished to give his one faithful spy her orders.

"If I could only get at the wires in her room! If I could only manage to tap her talk and messages to old Endicott! For this woman here in the office is surely her spy. Bagley may be.

"By Heavens! There is just one chance. And her mail! Justine may help me. What can she not do?"

His heart burned with a dull jealousy of that past when Justine had aided Hathorn on his upward way. "If she could only get around the janitor of the 'Circassia,' and the letter carrier. What money can do, I can aid her in, and she must do the rest—" He closed his eyes in a fierce glow of sensual irritation, for the Parisienne had already forged chains upon him which, with all his cold craft, he could not lightly break away from.

"She is not to be resisted—if she plays her own game. First the trip, then the other idea. But I could never handle this pale-faced St. Agnes—this lame bundle of all the virtues. I must have some one else here to watch Miss Mary Kelly—this convent-bred marvel.

"Why not find a smart woman to be my private stenographer and one of the right kind? She could also keep an eye on Bagley and the little dove-eyed devotee. Justine may help me to the right woman. I'll tell her all." He began to see Lakemere moving toward him.

The gilded child of fashion was first at the tryst, and Justine Duprez threw herself into her secret lover's arms with a glad cry of triumph, when ten o'clock brought her to the meeting place. "If I could only come to you," she fiercely sighed—"in your palace home!

"But wait—wait—till we have netted my lady. I have news now to make your heart dance."

The panting woman drew from her breast a scrawl of paper, on which she had copied even the office marks. "This telegram came this morning. You see that it is dated Washington." Vreeland's heart bounded as he read the words: "Arlington—to-morrow. Don't fail." Was it an appointment—a lover's secret call?

He could have shouted with triumph, as he gazed on the signature, "Alynton," for a messenger had brought him a note at the moment of his departure to meet Justine. His patroness had fallen into a snare.

"I am going to Pittsburg to-night. Come up and dine. I will give you your orders for a week."

He drew out the note, and glanced at the firm pen

stroke. "Can Alynton be the father of Alva Whiting?" he growled.

He dropped his head on the table, while Justine took off her hat and wraps with the easy insouciance of a Camille. He was mad with mingled greed and jealousy.

"Perhaps! Alynton's father was an irascible magnate of enormous wealth. They are about the same age. He may have feared his father's wrath, for he naturally should make a political marriage. Ah! my lady, you have lied to me.

"If it is not the old secret of two guilty hearts, then there is the gordian knot of the great Sugar intrigue in this."

His thoughts thronged upon him with lightning rapidity, and as her head lay on his arm, he gave the triumphant Frenchwoman her orders.

"Our whole future hangs on your adroitness. You must find out what goes on between them. In a hotel you have a far better chance than in either of her two homes."

Vreeland murmured that in her ears which made the vicious woman's cheeks redden.

"Bah! all we women are alike," she sneered. "But if she slyly sends me out?" There was a gloomy pause.

"I do not think that she suspects you," finally answered Vreeland. "Telegraph me here what you dare to.

"And bring me all the other news in person. Now, tell me all you know of this very saintly young Mary Kelly."

His voice had the ring of anxiety. "I have had the janitor and the letter-carrier watch her. They are

both friends of mine," modestly murmured Justine.

"She lives near us, on a side street, with her old mother. And never goes out with a man, except Officer Daly. Daly, the Roundsman. A *beau garçon*, too; but it may be only a flirtation *Catholique à l'Irlandaise*.

"I have often followed her myself to church. And she comes once a week to Madame. They always look over papers together."

"And that smug devil Bagley," cried Vreeland, "only comes to the door, leaves me the *pacquet* of bills, and does not even see Madame. He gets an order for the money, and then returns later with the receipted bills."

Justine was back at the Circassia before Vreeland left her rooms to engage in his little joust at poker with Mr. James Potter, whose morning diet of red pepper, cracked ice, and soda water had at last brought him up to the normal, after several sporadic cocktails.

All through the quiet duel of cards, Vreeland was haunted by the twin obstacles, Bagley and Miss Mary Kelly. "Bagley is a perfect servant, and I can not get any excuse to rid myself of him. My secrets are not kept where he can reach them," mused Vreeland.

"The girl I surely dare not displace; but I can get around them both, if I have the right kind of a woman here near me. I have the excuse of my 'outside correspondence' and social affairs.

"Miss Kelly is sacred to the affairs of this cool-headed patroness of mine. And even Elaine can not object.

"It would 'give away' her veiled espionage on me. Yes, that's the plan! I can advertise; pick one or two

out of a hundred women and then *try them on*," he craftily smiled, "and only begin my real operations when I have found the right one and the two young women have struck up an intimacy." He laughed. "My pretty spy shall watch the placid young saint."

Vreeland tossed upon his bed that night, and reflected upon the singular methods of his covert business.

A list of stocks sent to him by messenger, or personally delivered by Mrs. Willoughby, to be bought and sold, with seemingly no guiding rule; all the checks signed only by him as "Harold Vreeland, Trustee," and all the securities daily deposited, after due receipt and tag, in Mrs. Willoughby's steel vault compartment at the Mineralogical Bank. And she alone knew of gain or loss. He was only a gilded dummy.

But one great house guarded all these covert transactions, and the deliveries to them, in case of sales, were always made by an order on the cashier of the Mineralogical.

A dozen times the wily schemer had verified that Mrs. Willoughby knew all the details of each purchase or delivery long before his own daily report.

For when her account was actively moving, once a day the mistress and her secret agent always met.

But never had Elaine Willoughby's foot mounted the broad steps of the Elmleaf, neither had the luxury-loving man ever dared to yield to Justine's mad desire to visit him in his splendid new home.

"It would be simply a financial suicide—our joint ruin!" he had whispered.

"But wait—wait till I marry her!"

And then, their chiming laughter ended the daring



woman's pleadings. For the time was to come when the fortune of the generous dupe would be ruled by the victorious young Napoleon.

Harold Vreeland knew, in his heart, that the Queen of the Street was aware of the wild daily life of the men in the Elmleaf.

For after rout-ball, opera, and theatre there were often stolen visits, aided by the friendly mantle of darkness, and diamonds which had gleamed but an hour before on calm and unsullied brows at the opera glittered balefully in the crepuscular gloom of shaded rooms, where at least one of the passionate lovers was far away from home.

The schemer had, from the first, avoided all intimacies with these light-headed men.

He knew that each of his fellow *locataires* was a Don Juan, and that tragedy and comedy, sweet sin with shame, were traveling fast upon its heels and satiety stalking along; that aching brows upon rose-leaf couches haunted the decorous interiors of this abode of hidden pleasures. The Elmleaf was a Golgotha of reputations.

And only a fire or an earthquake could reveal the daringly desperate *liaisons*, which, urged on by the delightful zest of danger, would have made public, by any sudden disaster, a story far more ghastly than the untold record of that hideous night when the Hotel Royal went up in fire and flame.

It was in a dull resentment against Elaine, and spurred on by Potter's tipsy confidence, that Vreeland, now fearing nothing, drew Mrs. Alida Hathorn aside as he met her by hazard once more in the reception room of the Savoy. He was waiting for a momentary telegram from Justine, when his eyes

rested upon the alluring moonlight glances of that provoking young beauty, Mrs. Fred Hathorn. When she had gaily rallied him on the Sardanapalian splendor of his Elmleaf establishment, he whispered in burning words: "Why do you not ever come and see it?"

The costly fan trembled and snapped in her hand as she slowly said: "I wanted to ask you something to-day! *The time has come!*"

"With Mrs. McMorris?" she whispered, vaguely pointing toward his spider parlor.

"Without Mrs. McMorris," the ardent pleading voice replied.

"I will tell you all. *I will lay my life at your feet!*"

Alida Hathorn pouted. "I will never find my way." Her tone was that of light raillery, but her cheeks were deadly pale. She was trembling on the brink of her ruin.

And then, Vreeland, taking her hands in his, whispered to her words whereat the busy familiar devil at his side laughed in glee.

"If you mean to say yes," he murmured, "give me that red rose from your breast."

And when he raised his head, the rose in his hand was the pledge of a dark tryst of the devil's own making.

Before he slept, for his throbbing heart would not down in the crowning victory of his revenge upon the desperate Hathorn, he tore open a telegram which marked another milestone of his life.

"*Victory!*" he cried, for the words told him of Justine's success.

"They dined to-day alone at the place named, and I have news for you. Coming home, by Pittsburg."

The overjoyed scoundrel cried: "Potter was right, after all. Everything comes round to the man who waits."

For a study of the great journals told him of a forthcoming report fixing the policy of the Government upon the tariff.

"If she has the secret, she will surely act upon it," he cried. "That ties her to the great Sugar Trust's secret service. Perhaps he trusts her on account of the old love.

"Justine shall wrest the proofs from her by either fair means or foul. And, as for to-morrow night—" His lips were parched and dry as he thought of the light foot slipping up the stairway of the Elmleaf—"not with Mrs. McMorris!" He seemed to be wrapped in a golden whirlwind of success.

"If she comes once *when she wishes to*, she will come again *when I wish her to!*" gloated the schemer, whose mind was now fixed upon detaching Bagley upon some trumped-up errand and making such a feast as "Rose in bloom" laid out when the hoodwinked "Shah Jehan" was "away" at his palace of Ispahan.

"I now hold the cards, and I shall be the victor at last in this game of life," he swore, as he dreamed of those pleading moonlight eyes.

Harold Vreeland waited for two days in a fever of excitement for some mandate from his artful patroness. "She is a sly one at heart, after all, is Mme. Elaine," he growled. "Her stay 'at Pittsburg' is only to throw me off my guard, and perhaps Hathorn.

"She may have taken any one of a dozen short roads to steal back from her rendezvous with her senatorial confidant. Friend or lover—*which?*"

He groaned in helpless rage. His mean spirit, his hidden vicious agnosticism, made him doubt every woman.

To him they were all the same! The biting words of that crooked, malignant genius, Pope, came back: "Every woman is at heart a rake."

"By Jove! I have found them all to be living behind imitation fronts," he snarled.

He was seated in his office watching the pale-faced and silent Mary Kelly, when a street messenger arrived with a card sealed in an ordinary telegraph envelope.

It bore only these words, scrawled by the artful Frenchwoman: "Come over to the room."

Stealing a watchful glance at the silent girl in the office, Vreeland hastened away. He had never been able to approach the slightest intimacy with the gray-eyed Irish-American girl.

"Her convent shyness backs up her convent modesty," sneered Vreeland, who dared not covertly insult his patroness' protégé.

Plaintively handsome, her steadfast eyes gleaming with a patient resignation, the pale cheeks and slender form told of a life of semi-invalidism. When not employed on her fashionable master's business, she was ever busied copying literary manuscripts or legal documents.

"She's another cool hand," vulgarly imagined the upstart schemer.

"She knows that she is safe as long as Mrs. Wiloughby is at the other end of that private wire.

"But, perhaps this Daly, the Roundsman, may some day bring a glow to those cheeks. They are

all alike—mistress and maid—here in hot-hearted, wicked New York.

"This one's only a neat, sly little sneak, and a spy on me."

Vreeland's every nerve was tingling as he dashed up the stairs to Justine's nest on South Fifth Avenue.

Standing ready for instant departure, the excited girl told him of how she had stolen away while her fatigued mistress slept.

"You will hear from her at once—probably to come up to-night. Now, once for all, *there is no love between them*. I found my way as usual. Only business—*great business*—MONEY AFFAIRS—the play of the stocks. He is to come up in a month and bring a new Senator from the West.

"One of the secret friends; so, *mon ami*, you may soon have another rival."

Vreeland gnashed his teeth as the girl said: "They dined together—alone—and talked for hours. Senator Alynton gave her a paper after they had talked about the Government, about lawsuits and troubles, and that I sewed up in her corset for her in her presence before we left. Brother and sister they are, in friendship, but he never even raised her hand to his lips. *Elle est bien bête, trop bête, pour l'amour!*" was Justine's parting fling.

"You and I must get that paper, or a copy of it. It's our fortune!" he cried. But, Justine had fled, only adding: "She saw no other man. She only went there to meet Alynton. Now, back to your rooms. She will soon call for you."

Justine was a true prophetess, for while Vreeland sat in his rooms immersed in the study of a dozen newspaper articles upon an ominous flurry in the



"Sugar" securities, the lame girl tapped at his door. With a bow, she handed him the transcribed telephone message: "Please come up at once. Very important."

"Compliments, and say that I'll leave instantly," gravely replied Vreeland, without lifting his head.

As he hurried on toward the Circassia, he endeavored to frame some idea of the daring woman speculator's plans.

There were rumors of unfavorable tariff action, of hostile legislation, of adverse decisions of the courts to be expected, of a growing agitation against the "Sugar Trust," and even of the desire of the great Standard Oil Company to force the value of "Sugar shares" down by the pressure of their heavily-armed capitalistic secret brokers, and to "gobble" a controlling interest, or at least the bulk of the heavy holdings.

"This surely means a slaughter of the little fishes," mused Vreeland.

Rumors of a reincorporation of the seventy-five million dollar capitalized company in New Jersey, the threatened move to divide its capital stock into common and preferred, were rife on the Street.

"Ah!" growled Vreeland, as he glanced over a tabulated statement of the ratings since its organization. "This may either send the stock, now at seventy, down to forty or fifty, or up to a hundred and twenty-five. If I only knew?"

He laughed mockingly as he dismissed the subject. "It will only be double or quits."

"Double their wealth for the insiders—and quits for the poor devils squeezed to the wall!" While he waited in the drawing-room for his patroness, the woman whom he began to fear he never would make

his dupe or slave, he pondered over her real purposes in the vast hidden speculations.

"Has she not already money enough?" he enviously thought, gazing on the heaped-up splendors of costly taste around him. And then, he remembered that he had never met any man, woman, or child in New York City who had money enough.

"It's the fashionable craze—money-getting, by hook or crook," he reflected.

"And once mixed up in the game, it's hard for her to leave it, especially if she is the go-between who links some of the nation's statesmen to the great insiders of the Trust.

"This home may be only a sham, Lakemere only a way station for the friendly conspirators, and that paper may be a dangerous document which neither side would dare to hold. And old Endicott, too—what's his rôle?"

He was the more interested as Justine had swept away all suspicions of an *amourette* between the two whom he feared.

"Still there is the lost child. If I only knew how old the girl was," he fretted.

"It may be the child of the last decade, or the fruit of a girlish marriage. That secret, and the paper, I must have.

"But, Justine must steal the one, and I have got to reach her line of secret communications."

As he met his calmly-smiling secret employer he could not divine the revengeful purposes hidden under her gently-heaving bosom.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MISS ROMAINE GARLAND, STENOGRAPHER.

It was late that night when the excited Vreeland left the Circassia and he was still somewhat in the dark as to the real object of his veiled employment. He reasoned justly that there was not a grain of sentiment now in the frankly defined relations between himself and the Lady of Lakemere.

The money bond between them was only that cold one of employer and employed, and the unmistakable dignity of Elaine's business manner held him decidedly aloof. Here was no lover's thrall.

Not a single reference to her absence had escaped her lips. There was no pleasant, social white-lying going on between them, and he was still in the dark when he left, with the strictest orders to await every moment between ten and three, her signal for the beginning of stock operations of gigantic magnitude.

"This Sugar stock may pay twelve and seven per cent on common and preferred in a year, or else be driven down to half price. We must be wary," she sighed. "No one can truly forecast the actions of our courts, journals, electors or government," she mused. "The very principle of reckless instability is the one sure thing of all our American doings."

"And yet, you move along with the others, Madonna," smilingly said Vreeland.

"You shall see," she laughed. "The stock market, the sea, and a woman's heart are never at rest. Always distrust the seeming calm."

"Now," her voice became grave, "you are to be, each instant, ready at the post of duty. You will personally telephone your orders as received from me to your buyer. The bank will then telephone me the deliveries of the stock, and I will telephone you to pay over each cheque myself.

"The thing is to be reversed in sales, when you have received certified cheques to your name as trustee, for any sales, you are then to telephone down your delivery order to be confirmed by me, after you have brought me the cheques. I have a private wire to the cashier, remember.

"But, above all, silence. You are now suspected of being a daring and a lucky speculator. You will be watched.

"Therefore, go out everywhere in society during the next three weeks. Show yourself as gay and jolly as you can.

"I am also handling some other very heavy matters, and I wish you, just now, to be particularly thought the gayest reveler in Gotham.

"In exhibiting yourself everywhere, the gossips will cease to watch us jointly and our different purposes will be divided in the public eye.

"Miss Kelly's record of each day's transactions will be your warrant. She comes to me nightly to report."

Vreeland was overjoyed as he received Mrs. Willoughby's hearty approval of his employing a personal stenographer.

"If you get the right person," said his patroness, "she may be a pleasant companion for my trusted little Mary."

When he had raised the lady's hand to his lips and departed he realized how sternly he was being kept out

of her real councils. Even the vainest fool could not have deceived himself.

"It's the payment of money, the changing of coin between us, that simply makes me only an upper servant," he snarled.

"Once that money passes between man and woman, in any relation, there is an end of any free will. But, I can wait. And, you shall pay me, Madame, to the uttermost, when you are in my power."

He knew the probable magnitude of the transactions and, even his iron nerve was shaken.

"It cannot be merely herself, it is the grouped official cowards behind her, who are making money on the sly."

He found a new surprise awaiting him at his rooms, one which brought the blood to his heart with a sudden surge. There was a bunch of red roses awaiting him with a sealed note. He knew not the handwriting, but, his eyes gleamed with a strange fire as he read:

"The Lady of the Red Rose will visit you at ten to-morrow night. Remember your promise. *Fail not.* She will be veiled and dressed in black. *Be alone.* And, at your door, *at ten.*"

"They are all the same," he gasped, with a wildly beating heart, "under the rose, lurks always some wild intrigue, some desperate game.

"Life in New York is only a game of catch who catch can."

And, when the sunset of the next day came, Mr. Harold Vreeland had dispatched the acute Bagley to Boston with a "valuable package" to be deposited in a Safe Deposit Company there, and he was seated in his own room gazing tenderly upon the crimsoned flowers whose mute incense filled the air.



The crawling hands of the clock were a torture to the man whose darkest purpose was now hidden behind a smiling face—for it is not often given, even to a smooth scoundrel, to betray two women at once. He was swimming in a sea of glory, now.

Vreeland slept but little after his conference with his resolute and beautiful patroness. He had scanned her face keenly to see the "sweet unrest of Love," or the play of a hidden passion written there, but all that the keen schemer could discern was the calmness of a settled purpose, the poise of an unshaken self-control.

"She has either no heart, or else, a marvelous power of dissimulation," he wearily decided. He felt that she was playing some great hidden game in which he was but a mere pawn, a poor private soldier in the fight.

"It's a waiting game," he rightly concluded, "but, it is for vengeance, or a fight to cover up her clouded past."

He knew now that Elaine Willoughby was victorious over her young social enemy at every point of the field. For, the house of Hathorn was known to be divided against itself, and the once magnificent Frederick's careworn brow showed a sullen discontent.

Hathorn's disgruntled face was now too often reflected in the mirrors of the Café Savarin bar; he was shunned at the clubs even by the young *flaneurs* who had now gone over bodily to Mrs. Willoughby, and the little Sunday afternoon *séances* at Mrs. Alida Hathorn's became noted for their daring *camaraderie* and the "high class vaudeville" enacted there.

Hathorn was now more frequently absent from town "upon business," and Vreeland wrongly suspected him of tracing down the past antecedents of "his dearest foe."

"What the old Harry did she throw him over and pick me up for?" he vainly pondered. "She may have found him creeping too closely on her track and perhaps she feared him.

"To cut the cord, she has pushed him out, and, pensioned him off on Alida.

"But, what chilling spectre of the past affrights her? That I can only reach by tapping her secret lines.

"I must get in between Endicott and her. I must find out her relations with the Sugar Trust, and also get at the underground railroad to the chamber where the first news of the secret operations of the 'Senate Finance Committee' makes her the witch of the Street.

"She is a sly one. She may be trading coldly on the secrets of the Sugar magnates, possibly selling out her senatorial friends and betraying old Endicott's banking connections.

"Her social entertainments, those little confidences of the 'pearl boudoir,' give her a safe chance to play these men off, the one against the other."

Vreeland's San Francisco experience, his analytical brain, and his quick wit, had enabled him in his few months of New York stock speculating, to quietly pick up every trick of the "put, call and straddle," every dark cross of the bucket-shop infamy, every "dummy" subterfuge used in "shearing the sheep."

He knew now every mystery of "doubled trades," "crossing trades," and "wiping out a margin."

"She has evidently never trusted me for a single moment, and, has covered her right hand, while she has played me as a 'left bower.' "

It dawned upon him that she perhaps, like David,

said in her heart, "All men are liars." That her "developing process" with Fred Hathorn had made her "sadly wise," and that she was "trying him out" now at every distance, before making him a champion.

He had, however, preserved the same even, devoted watchful courtesy, and he was wise enough not to try to jump blindly from "seed time" to harvest. "She has not opened her heart to me; if she ever marries me, it will only be when she is driven to my arms.

"But, I can wait."

And, so, never having dipped deeper into any true woman's heart than the light-winged swallow brushing the lake, he forgot that he was not true to her. He knew not the force of those ringing lines of "A Fo'castle Ballad":

"If you're good to her, she's good to you!

For a woman's square, if you treat her right!"

The morning found the energetic Mr. Harold Vreeland in close conference with the thin-lipped Miss Marble, of "Marble's Business Agency," near that dingy little square where Greeley in bronze gazes vacantly down at his own feet, awed by the stony glare of the New York Herald's singularly inartistic owls.

The wary woman broker had listened in silence to the young banker's long description of his need of an accomplished "private secretary."

She flushed slightly when Vreeland mentioned the Elmleaf as the scene of the varied "labors."

The quiet orgies of that "whited sepulchre" were now the theme of much whispered comment over the whole Tenderloin.

There were other "rising men" besides Harold Vreeland burning the candle of Life at both ends there

and covertly reënacting the lurid scenes of old Monte Tiberio, and infamous Baia.

"Expense is no object, my dear Miss Marble," softly purred Vreeland. "I fancy you know now what I want. I would prefer a capable young woman who is a stranger to New York City.

"One who has been accustomed to refinement. My private correspondence is largely social."

The handsome scoundrel's eye sunk under the keen woman's direct thrust.

"There may be an objection on the part of the young lady, your social surroundings are of the gayest."

Miss Marble was already familiar through the "blanket sheets," with the comet-like cavorting of the young Western star in these Eastern skies.

"There is a business secretary, always there on duty, an exemplary young woman now in my employ, so, you can dismiss all your fears," insidiously remarked Vreeland, "and, for the right person, I will pay you any commission that you ask."

The eyes of the two adroit schemers met.

"I want a woman whom I can train up into my own ways," meaningly said Vreeland. "I think that you understand me, now."

The pale-green eyes of Miss Marble shone with glee at the prospect of some other woman "with reluctant feet" going blindly on to the thirty-third degree initiation of the hard ways of New York.

"I do, perfectly," she replied, her thin, pitiless lips pressed closely together.

"How shall I select the one who is best fitted to suit you?" Her voice was slightly shaky.

"Easy enough," lightly cried Vreeland, reaching for

his hat and cane. "Take two or three days. Go over the whole field of your most promising applicants. Have say, four or five of them here to meet me when you are ready.

"You can indicate the one whom you would prefer. Find out all their private histories, as far as you can get at it," he uneasily laughed.

"I will call in, of course, by hazard, and then take a look at them. You can then have the one whom we decide upon, meet me as your only candidate. The rest you can leave to me. If the first one is not suitable, we will follow on down the list.

"Remember, salary is no object. I am liberal in all things, especially, as to your commission."

For once in her artful career, Miss Joanna Marble infused a real warmth into the clasp of her clammy hand.

For these two read between the lines of each other's impassive faces.

"A very fine man—the sort of man likely in time, to get shot or lynched, down South," mused the veteran Miss Marble, "as near a sleek human wolf in sheep's clothing as they put them up."

And, then, Joanna Marble carefully indited a drag-net advertisement which next day brought a shoal of young womanhood to the breakers of her woman trap.

There was "the solemn silence of the night," the "speaking silence of a dream," at ten o'clock, as the waiting Harold Vreeland listened with a beating heart behind the portals of his aerial den in the Elmleaf.

That gliding step came at last. "Soft as the dews that fell that night," was the footfall of the Lady of the Red Rose when *très discrètement vêtue*, in shrouding



black, with her face swathed in an impermeable veil, Alida Hathorn glided into his room, and coolly threw aside her hat and wraps.

The flowers and ornate wealth of decorations made the room a very dream of luxury. Vreeland sprang forward when he had locked the door, but the burning words of tenderness on his lips were stayed as a slender, uplifted arm stopped him. The visitor's face was impassive.

"Not yet. We must understand each other," was the whisper which sounded like the voice of a lost soul. It was, with a fatal overreaching, that Vreeland murmured, "This is hardly the place for a business interview."

"I know it," stolidly said Alida Hathorn, turning toward him a face whose burning eyes thrilled him to his bosom's core. "You have as much to lose as I have, perhaps more.

"My life is ruined," she gloomily said. "We will play fair to-night, you and I, with the cards on top the table. I know all your game—you shall now know mine. And, I presume that both of us are willing to pay the price."

A French clock ticked away in the awkward silence, and then, Vreeland, a master of woman's moods, quietly seated himself beside the excited woman, and took her burning palms in his own.

"Tell me what your will is. It shall be my law," he simply said.

Alida Hathorn coldly studied his face for a moment. "I will soon test your sincerity," she answered. "I will tear off the lying mask we all wear for a moment, and let you see the real woman behind the society veneer.

"I have found out that my husband is only a reck-

less stock gambler, a man who coldly married me simply as 'means to an end.' He is half crazed by his loss of influence in the Street.

"He has lately established secret branches of his house in Buffalo, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago and Montreal.

"There seems to have been some devil crossing him everywhere, and, he has also fought out a silent duel to the death with Elaine Willoughby, who has torn the old firm to pieces."

Vreeland was now watching her with gleaming eyes.

"Wolfe has nothing whatever to lose. My husband insists that I shall back the firm (practically himself), and, he swears that you are the most successful man on the Street. He knows of all your individual plunging.

"And he knows, too, that you are 'on the inside' of the great Sugar deals, the Oil Company's intrigues, and, are first favorite now since Hathorn married."

Her voice rang out bitterly as she buried her face in her hands. "A woman's capacity of resistance has its limits.

"I come to you to-night for help. I will make one last effort to break him of his mad folly, or else, leave him to his fate.

"When he is penniless, he may follow me over to Europe. He, at least, will be a husband, in name; a protection against the foreign society mob, over there." Her voice was bitterly hard.

Vreeland began to murmur platitudes.

The beautiful woman's eyes flashed. "Don't dissemble. You shall know what I want!" she cried, pacing the room in her rising agitation.

"There is an ominous look in the Sugar market. You

will go into the deal on a sure basis. Open your heart to me to-night, for my own sake. Give me your game for the next week. Let me copy it. I will make just one turn for him. If you only play fair, I may save him. It may bring me peace.

"If Hathorn will not be ruled, then my future life will be my own. I depend on you—on your honor, on your pledges made to me, at the Waldorf and the Savoy. I have come to you, here, fearlessly. What is your answer?"

They were facing each other, as Vreeland hoarsely whispered, "And, my reward?" The woman's warring soul shone in her eyes.

"Let me know first that I can trust you," she whispered with ashen lips. "Trust to me, and, remember a woman's gratitude can overpay. Drive no hard bargain with me."

In a moment, Harold Vreeland, on his pinnacle of sudden prosperity, saw the gulf yawning before him. "If Elaine should find it out." He bowed his head, but the truth stole into his lying face.

"Is it possible that you are a coward?" cried Alida Hathorn. "You would flinch before the woman who has come to you here—*here*, at your bidding. I believed that we both were ready to pay the price." He sprang to her side, in answer to the invitation of her eyes.

"Listen," he whispered. "I will, so help me God, give you all the duplicate orders of my private account for the next two weeks. But, to you, alone."

He listened, and was astounded at her daring plan to receive his betrayal of the confidence of a woman who had been her bane, and yet, he yielded to the charm at last.

The echo of her departing foot on the stair left him

stunned and breathless at his own unwitting self-surrender. For, caught off his guard, he had left the vantage-ground which he proposed to hold.

"In any case, neither of us will dare to speak. There is ruin staring us both in the face, and, we should play fair. Fear is a wise counselor," she had frankly said. He trembled before her moonlight eyes, burning in a wild unrest.

She had dominated him at the last, and, swept away an unscarred victor.

Three days of wild excitement followed the nocturnal visit of the Lady of the Red Rose. Vreeland was unable to leave his apartment even for a moment to meet Justine, his busy spy, or to respond to the urgent invitation of Miss Joanna Marble, who had telegraphed to him: "I have found the very woman you want. A perfect stranger, and, a beauty."

In the haste of his feverish stock gambling, he had only time to order this happily discovered nonpareil to await his pleasure.

"Keep her with you. Give her a month's salary, in advance. Accept my check sent by messenger as your commission. Will call soon." So he had telegraphed in reply to the adroit Miss Marble, and dashed off a check for a round sum—a sum which clearly indicated to the overjoyed Miss Marble, the nature of the "discretionary advice" which she was to give to the beautiful neophyte in New York's fiercest glitter.

Harold Vreeland, with a pale face, sat on watch in his own room, his eyes glued upon the features of Mary Kelly as she recorded each momentous message from the strange woman at the Circassia who was now playing a gigantic game.

An influx of bank and stock private confidential messengers, the evening conferences with Elaine Willoughby, and a breathless study of check book stubs "delivery and statements," pressed him, while the pale-faced woman near him, cut out every lurid article of the daily journals describing the cyclonic rise and fall of the price of Sugar Certificates now heaving in a storm of unrest as sweeping as the Bay of Fundy's tides.

Below, in the noisy street, the newsboys bawled "extras," while all the hotels, clubs and money marts were thronged with excited babblers.

For three days, the corridors of the New York Stock Exchange were crowded with men whose vulpine faces were either hardened by despair, or else excitedly gleaming with the flush of victory.

Broad and Wall streets were filled with excited crowds, while in the galleries, the clients, reporters and money-betting public watched the members on the floor struggling over Sugar.

From ten to three daily the heat of battle was on, and, even after dark the duels of winner and loser were transferred "uptown."

In the Consolidated Petroleum and Stock Exchange a mad riot reigned, intensified by the vociferous dealings of the crowding "curb-stone" brokers.

With a cowardice newly born of his mean treason, Harold Vreeland trembled as he crept out of the "Elmleaf," during the three days to steal into a decorous-looking private residence near, where from ten to three with her eyes glittering with a fierce excitement, Alida Hathorn sat in a rear parlor, guarded by the all too accommodating Mrs. Volney McMorris cozily esconced upstairs.



But the schemer well knew that Hathorn was a leading figure in the downtown mêlée where "Sugar" had been steadily hammered down from "seventy" to "fifty" under tremendous sales. Every conceivable disaster had been suddenly "materialized" around the standard of the hitherto strongly upheld monopoly.

It was on Friday, at one o'clock, that Vreeland, awe-struck, added up his scheduled statement of sales, on ten-day delivery terms. It amounted to nearly twenty thousand shares, and the total of the transactions astounded him.

He had just stolen in to report the last order to Alida Hathorn, a sale of a thousand shares, and she had gleefully whispered, "You have already handled twenty, but I have turned forty thousand shares, and I've now reached my limit. If it goes down ten dollars more, we can cover all our contracts and clear nearly a half million dollars."

Vreeland's eyes opened in wonder, as he saw the file of waiting messengers in her gallery, and a cipher book at her side. He fled away in silence.

At the door of his room, he was seized by Mary Kelly, her white hands trembling. "She is there now at the instrument, calling you—hasten."

Bold, intrigant, as he was, Vreeland paled, and the blood left his heart as he listened to Elaine Wyloughby's last orders. It was a most momentous message. "Telegraph instantly down over private wire, to Cashier Mineralogical Bank. For my order, *buy in*, at once—on this board—forty thousand shares of Sugar in lots of one to five thousand shares. Do not leave the instrument for one moment, till you report the execution back to me. Have them telegraph to you the buying rate of each lot and report when all is

bought in. Then I will come to the Waldorf and send over for you.

"I will sign the checks myself there at the hotel. Keep the messengers there in your room with the stocks. I have suite No. 700 in the hotel."

Mary Kelly's flying fingers had recorded the momentous message in shorthand as it fell from Hathorn's pallid lips, and, her fingers then pressed the telegraph key with lightning rapidity. Vreeland was dazed. "My God, this is ruin for her," he whispered. It was of the Lady of the Red Rose he spoke.

"You must sit here, sir, and record for me," cried the girl. "They are holding me on the wire." The agony of hell was in the heart of the entrapped scoundrel.

He knew that his whole personal future now depended on executing his mistress' behests with lightning rapidity. There was no way to warn Alida Hathorn. He dared not trust Bagley—a spy, perhaps.

One hasty sentence of explanation and he sat down at the table, beside the girl, while far away at the Circassia, Elaine Willoughby eagerly awaited the warning ring of the telephone bell. In three-quarters of an hour, Vreeland staggered to the speaking tube. "The whole order is covered," he reported, "opening price, forty-nine; closing price, seventy-three. I will await you here."

With a sickening heart, the would-be traitor watched Mary Kelly adding up the scheduled lots and averaging the prices.

"The whole forty thousand shares average us sixty-four dollars," she whispered, pushing the paper over to him, as she bent over her clicking key. "There has been a terrific rise. Failures on the

Street are reported. Sugar is going up with jumps. Market practically bare."

"My God!" groaned Vreeland, as he hid his face for a few moments in his own room.

"This will be her ruin. Poor Alida. Forty thousand shares left to cover, means a loss of three-quarters of a million."

And then his own white face stared back at him, in the glass as his trembling lips refused to frame the question: "Did Elaine know of his treachery?" For, it seemed that his sin had found him out.

He dared not even for a single moment leave the presence of the girl who was now recording each message from the cashier of the bank, announcing the departure of the agents with each lot of the stocks as bought in.

"Was it a blind pool to break and make a market?" he queried.

But, he found no time to steal away an instant from Mary Kelly's eyes and the impassive Bagley who stood waiting to conduct him to Mrs. Willoughby at the Waldorf. "I am watched," the cowed traitor muttered.

The house was dark where Alida Hathorn had directed her secret campaign when Vreeland, under Bagley's escort, returned at midnight from the Waldorf. Vreeland turned his eyes away in a sickening dread.

The only remark made by the serene Queen of the Street was a commendation of his promptness. She was graciously cheerful. "The market turned upon us so quickly, that not a moment was to be lost," placidly remarked Elaine Willoughby, whose pleasant smile of dismissal followed the sending up of a card whereon Vreeland saw the words "Hiram Endicott."

But, his patroness said, "You have earned a week's rest. I can now give you that. You can amuse yourself for a week. I shall stand out of the market. You can go ahead and pick up the threads of current affairs down town.

"Remember, not a word of this to Wyman. It would lead to our instant parting. You have done well. I know now that I can trust to you, to the very last."

Vreeland shuddered and stole away, wearing a sickly smile. The night had new terrors for him now.

All that long night, Mr. Harold Vreeland paced his room, waiting for the morrow. His haggard face was gray and ashen in the morning dawn, as he waited for the earliest journals.

And, for once, the brandy bottle was his friend.

He recalled a thousand times the impassioned face of the beautiful woman who had blindly followed his desperate lead.

"I had nothing to lose," he mused. "This fierce play was only a flurry to my nerves, but, she may be wrecked. And if she should now turn upon me."

He did not dare to think of facing her, and he even feared to show himself in Wall Street until the news of his beautiful accomplice's situation should reach him.

"Where would she land on Life's stormy seas?" He did not dare to face the ruin he had wrought.

An occupation for his morning hours suggested itself. He would visit Miss Joanna Marble, and so, at eleven o'clock, he was seated in her "Bureau," curiously awaiting the arrival of the young woman who was to fill the lofty position of "private secretary" to the "star" of the Elmleaf. Leaning out of the window, he beckoned to one of a shouting mob of newsboys as

the words "Extra! extra! Failures in Wall Street!" resounded high above the din of Herald Square.

Tossing the lad a half dollar, he unfolded the still damp sheet. Among the glaring headlines, he read, "Failure of Hathorn & Wolfe. Liabilities, one million dollars."

He sank back in his chair, and then, seized with a sudden impulse, he quickly ran downstairs and jumped into a coupé, bidding the agent detain the expected beauty.

Some indefinable impulse led him to his rooms, where the grave Bagley handed him a telegraphic dispatch. He tore it open and read the bitter lines: "You have lied and basely betrayed me. I have left America forever. I leave it to the future to punish you." The signature, "Red Rose," was that of a woman who was sobbing alone in her stateroom on the Etruria, as she glided past the Narrows on this sunny Saturday morning.

With a clouded brow, Vreeland descended the stair and at the street door, met Mr. Jimmy Potter, who whispered: "Fred Hathorn has cleared out to Havana—last night—the fool. He gouged his wife out of half a million.

"I saw her off on the Etruria to-day, and I'm going to save what I can for her out of the wreck, and, then go over and meet her in Paris.

"I told you that all things would come round to the man who waits."

With a smothered oath, Vreeland pushed on, glad to escape the easy-going tormentor who was destined to be the *prochain ami* of the daring Lady of the Red Rose.

He dashed away to Miss Marble's "Bureau," where



his eyes gleamed as Miss Joanna led him into her private room. Her warning glance gave him the key to his conduct.

And he was speechless in silent rapture, as he gazed upon the fresh and womanly beauty of "Miss Romaine Garland, stenographer."

"She is the very woman," he mused. "The woman of my dreams."

Afar, uptown, in the shaded boudoir of her pleasaunce palace, Elaine Willoughby dropped the newspaper from her hands. "I am safe at last. He is a criminal fugitive.

"And, now, to plead to God for the return of my child."

## CHAPTER IX.

## SENATOR ALYNTON'S COLLEAGUE.

An exciting month had slipped away after the sudden Sugar flurry in Wall Street which had filled its gray granite channels with lame and dead ducks.

Seated in his cozy morning room at the "Elmleaf," Mr. Harold Vreeland was reflectively watching the snowflakes whirled by a March storm in fluffy white eddies, and furtively gazing askance upon the beautiful face of Romaine Garland at his side.

"Where have I seen that face before?" he mused, as the lovely stenographer arose with a silent bow, and passed through the half-open door to seat herself at her typewriting table, *en vis-à-vis* with Mary Kelly nodding over her clicking telegraph instrument.

There was ample time for Vreeland to attend to his growing personal correspondence in these long mornings when he awaited the next secret orders of his patroness. But, a singular social and speculative lethargy now seemed to have seized upon Mrs. Elaine Willoughby. The nearness of Lent, the reaction of the giddy winter social season, and the cares of a large property all contributed to keep the woman who had fought Alida Hathorn to a finish, out of the garish glare of show society.

All the news that Vreeland could gain from the watchful Doctor Alberg and the pliant Justine was, that the Lady of Lakemere was seemingly drifting into a settled melancholy. Vreeland was astonished at the dead water into which he himself had glided.

His afternoons were regularly spent now at the Wall Street office, where Wyman was busied with the "legitimate."

It had been Vreeland's secret self-appointed task to follow out all the details of the Hathorn & Wolfe failure, whose echoes still reverberated in the curses of the defrauded customers.

Wolfe was left alone to face the music, and the whole financial world knew that the great sums paid in to the firm's coffers by customers in the sudden Sugar flurry had been all diverted by the fugitive Hathorn to margin those enormous private deals of his own plunging, which, even criminal in their character, had been made dead against the rising market. The "double or quits" had been "quits" with him. His disgraced name was off the club lists, the VanSittart town mansion was closed, the deserted Oakwood place was garrisoned for a long foreign stay of the unhappy heiress, and "lightly they spoke of the spirit" which had fled with Hathorn's good luck.

There was little left for the plundered creditors to divide but "experience."

Wolfe, the luckless partner, was sullen and crushed, and a new champion, Mr. James Potter, alertly moved around town gathering up loose ends in the interest of the absent wife.

Wyman, beyond a cold comment that Hathorn's "pace had been a killing one," never referred to the utter crash of their natural enemies, and the social world was beginning to forget Mr. Frederick Hathorn, having relegated him to the "Limbo" of failure, and marked him off as a "has been." The mad rush of New York life soon tramples the forgotten graves to a dead level.

In the avoidance of any question as to his regular morning absence, Vreeland knew that Wyman had been evidently posted by Judge Endicott as to Vreeland's sidereal duties under the orders of Mrs. Willoughby.

It was wormwood to the man who still aspired to read every hidden secret of Elaine Willoughby's life to know that Wyman and Endicott now frequently spent the long evenings with the Queen of the Street at the "Circassia," and that vouchers, schedules and papers covered the great table where only the three sat, well out of reach of Justine's eaves-dropping.

"Cool old file is Endicott," growled Vreeland. "Cased in steel armor of proof. Nor passion, pride, nor weakness ever leaves him open to the enemy a moment."

And then his habitual sneer returned. "Bah! He is too old for all of man's follies. It is only the young and ardent who burn with fond hopes and bravely take the chances of life in the open.

"He has nothing left to gain, why should he disquiet himself? Man delights him not, no—nor woman either."

But Mrs. Elaine Willoughby had really overplayed the game of an assumed carelessness as to Hathorn's fate. Vreeland was not deceived.

He narrowly watched her when he ventured to call and report the aftermath of the Hathorn failure. Her lack of interest in the downfall of the two whom she had fought in society and on the Street was entirely forced. She gloated over her victory.

Her despondency, however, was real, for a vague sorrow shone in her eyes and the great rooms of the Circassia were no longer filled with that glittering

throng which she had drawn away from Alida Hathorn's Fifth Avenue drawing-rooms.

"Did she ever love Hathorn?" was Vreeland's self-torturing question. "And is her vengeance after all only Dead Sea fruit?" He secretly resented the calm, equable kindness of his patroness, for there was no answering glow within her splendid eyes, no quickening of her frozen pulses at his approach.

"She has only used me as a human buffer, a switch to safely reach the other track, and I have worked under the espionage of the adroit Mary Kelly. I see her whole plan," wrathfully decided Vreeland.

"To break up her whole secret into disjointed links. To play us off, one against the other, and then perhaps to drop me, forever, as she dropped Hathorn, if I am ever caught napping.

"She guards some momentous secret. Either of this hidden syndicate's inside methods, or else the dangerous past life which blackens her present. How much of that did Hathorn know?

"Not enough to hurt her. But, I will rule her by fear yet, for love is out of the game. Let me secretly tap her lines, and, then, *gare le corbeau!*"

He had once timidly approached Mrs. Willoughby as to the immediate-future programme of the uptown "special bureau." His patroness manifested but little interest and simply coldly said, "You will have ample leisure for society and your own affairs. Remain there silent, watchful, and always on duty, though.

"The reincorporation in New Jersey, the coming division into common and preferred stock, and the court's dubious actions may cause me to act strongly in simulated attack or defense, at any moment. And there's always that veering Congress; its actions are



inexplicably swayed under flex or reflex of the public mind, private manipulation or "advanced journalism." Vreeland chafed in his heart that there had been as yet no *rapprochement* between himself and Senator Alynton. A slight cold disdain seemed to chill that magnate's courtesy in all their brief *rencontres*. "He likes me not!" was the schemer's just observation. And yet, he gravely held a uniform courtesy.

A special delivery letter at last awoke Vreeland from his reverie, as he was furtively gazing at Miss Romaine Garland's shapely head bowed over her machine, and then the tube's whistle announced from below a call of "Mr. James Potter" on "the most important business."

The letter lay unopened as Vreeland wonderingly advanced to meet his unfrequent visitor.

It was easy to see that the "butterfly" of fashion was gravely impressed. It was none of the Dickie Doubleday's crumpled rose leaves which had brought the pale-faced man to the luxurious sky parlors of the "Elmleaf." His merry face was soberly overshadowed.

With little formality, Jimmy Potter closed the door into the rooms where the two women were engaged, and, not without a glance of impelled admiration at the statuesque stenographer, broke into a confidence which astounded Vreeland.

"Hear me out first, Vreeland," he soberly said, "and then help me if you can. I'm off on the steamer for Havre to-morrow. To join Hathorn's widow."

Vreeland started, but Potter's outstretched arm kept him in his chair.

"Poor Fred was drowned two days ago by the upsetting of a boat at Cienfuegos. The fact is, the Cuban authorities were after him, and so, he cleared out of Havana."

"I've sent a good man down there to do all that may be done, in a decent respect for his past. Mrs. Hathorn has just cabled for me. I have had a long letter from her.

"Some damned traitor deliberately gave her the dead cross on the 'Sugar Deal.' She was trying to get Fred out of the Street. And so, she plunged on fifty thousand shares of Sugar on this lying tip, came out short, and has to pay, as Hathorn shoved all their customers' money in to hold over his own huge, private gamble until the market broke down to forty. It's up to seventy-eight and there to stay. Now, she wishes to make restitution to the men whom the firm robbed. And I have to help her settle her own private losses."

"Poor woman," murmured Vreeland, with an agitation which did not escape Potter. The little man was all broken up.

"See here, Vreeland!" cried Potter, "I have had a glimpse into a real woman's heart. This fatal quarrel with the Willoughby has wrecked two lives. Hathorn believed Mrs. Willoughby to be invincible in the Street.

"He tried to follow her game. She is reported to have dealt in Sugar up to several millions.

"Do you suppose that she laid a trap for Hathorn's wife to fall into? Who gave her the false tips? I hope that the author of this misery will roast in hell."

"I know nothing. I am not in speculative stocks," musingly said Vreeland.

"Someone may have taken advantage of the Hathorns and lured them on by pretending to give them Mrs. Willoughby's game. I am busied here now, half the day, with my own private matters."

"It was soul-murder, whoever did it," said Potter.

"Alida Hathorn went in nobly to help and save her husband. To aid him, to square him with the Street and his firm, and then to take him forever out of the turmoil and convoy him over to Europe. She has loads of money, you know. But, the Ring was too much for him.

"He plunged, too, on her tip, and then came the crash, his flight, and now his untimely death. It's all due to the one who lured Alida Hathorn on to ruin her husband. It was a fiend's work." A silence reigned, a gloomy acquiescence.

Vreeland was moodily regarding the falling snow through the darkened panes when Jimmy Potter sighed and said: "Well, it's good-by, old fellow. I've got an expert with Wolfe going over the real honest debts.

"I shall stay over there, advise with Alida and see that the sufferers get their money. For she has been a wifely sacrifice; she is high-spirited and true, she outclassed Hathorn. Mrs. Willoughby set him up, and then threw him down.

"His pride never got over her ruin of his firm's reputation by drawing all her business out.

"Of course, the society snakes who poisoned the young wife's mind brought on the social catastrophe. I would like to feel that Elaine Willoughby did not betray that poor young woman. But I'll square it all by and by."

"How?" eagerly demanded Vreeland. Potter was brave in a mad resolve.

The young millionaire paused, hat and umbrella in hand. "I have found a business in life at last. One that suits me.

"If Alida Hathorn has not money enough to square all the honest claims, *I have*. For a year and a day

from Hathorn's death, I shall marry her, and then give her a woman's decent happiness.

"It was a false ambition that pushed Hathorn into her circle. He was only a good-looking upstart, and never worthy of her.

"So, you can see all comes around to the man who waits.

"Now, I count on your sense of manliness to protect the name of Fred Hathorn's widow, the woman who will be my wife, for, with all your money, you would not be in New York to-day, as you are, at the top of the ladder but for Hathorn.

"You stand in his shoes up at Lakemere, here, in the Circassia, and you of all men, should be considerate to his memory." The scheming liar bowed his head in a speechless agitation.

Vreeland escorted his visitor to the stair. "If I need any private tip, I may use you," said Potter. "I'll be at Hotel Vendôme, Paris, till I have made her Mrs. Jimmy Potter, if we live."

With a last touch of his old lightness, the champion of the absent Alida whispered, "That's a young goddess you have captured." Potter had observed the Bona Dea.

Vreeland frowned gravely as he followed the furtive gesture.

"Miss Garland has entire charge of all the books and records of my private estate," he coldly said.

"I am a man of system and order. The other little woman is my private telegraph operator. She is a part of our 'business force.'" Vreeland affected the careworn millionaire.

"Ah, you don't mix up the two affairs. Very good, very good," complacently said Potter as he disappeared,

leaving Vreeland startled. He bore away fruitful memories of Vreeland's downcast hesitation.

The hard-hearted schemer took a pull at the brandy bottle. "It was a close shave," he murmured.

"Alida Hathorn is game to the very last. She has not given him my name, and now, as she will finally drift into this fortunate marriage, the Lady of the Red Rose will be only a buried memory.

"I am safe, and he never will know. The lovely 'Red Rose' is only another flower in *le Jardin Secret*."

He realized, at last, that the daring imprudence of Alida Hathorn's visit was but a jealous wife's device, at any risk, to break the lines of her husband's enemies.

"She got my secret far too easily," he gloomily reflected, "and without paying the price.

"I wonder if she was playing me as a lone fish," he pondered—and then a flash came to enlighten him.

"Could Elaine Willoughby fancy that the news of her plunging would leak out and ruin them?

"By heaven! She may have crossed this gigantic trade by secret orders to Endicott. Hathorn ruined, she may have no further use for me.

"And if the Lady of the Red Rose should ever speak I would be ruined, even held at arms length as I am."

He shuddered under the curse of the burning words of that last telegram.

"She believes me a liar and traitor to her, and I will never dare to undeceive her." He felt that he had missed the finest play of his life.

But the "special delivery" letter still stared him in the face. He carelessly tore it open and then a smile wreathed his lips.

"To meet Senator Alynton, Senator Garston, and



Miss Katharine VanDyke Norreys at dinner." He instantly wrote out and dispatched his acceptance. A glow of joy lit up his anxious face.

"I must get Justine at work soon on my secret lines. I see it all. These Senators are of the 'Inner Guild,' the true illuminati.

"Who the devil is this Garston—some Western fellow?"

A few moments' reference gave him the news: "Senator-elect from one of the newly knocked together Western States"—the "means to an end" in balancing National elections. The trick of warring plutocrats and democrats.

He paced the room in deep thought, after dispatching his reply. "The battle will be on again soon. The Trust is reorganized and conveniently removed to little Jersey. The courts have now done their worst, and the small holders are all squeezed out.

"Now for a game of high ball. Yes, my lady, that's your trick. A new deal. And the beautiful Californian heiress is only a bright lay-figure.

"Your real hold on the Street is the secret chain linking these statesmen, through you and Endicott, to the secret chiefs of the Sugar Syndicate.

"I'll get myself into your current, as a 'transmitter,' and you, Madame Elaine, shall yet learn to bow and bend. The child, the secrets of this dangerous partnership, the story of your past life, I can soon get it all, bit by bit. And, then, marriage and 'dominion over you.' That's my game!"

There was an unpleasant menace lingering in the last words of the departing Potter. Vreeland knew that should the generous-hearted ex-banker, in time, marry Fred Hathorn's widow, the few hundred thousands

lost in saving Hathorn's personal honor would not in any way impair their united estates. He lingered long on the subject. He feared this new alliance.

"They might crush me, if they joined forces. The one danger is a reconciliation with Mrs. Willoughby. I will see that this never occurs."

And so, with a sense of defeat clinging to his past attempts, he decided to use great care in approaching his proposed dupe, Miss Romaine Garland.

For his patroness certainly was not wearing her heart upon her sleeve now. Her private sorrows busied her more than the confidential intimacy with her newest *protégé*.

"She could drop me, ruin me, or trap me as easily as she finished off Hathorn," he decided.

"And the hot-headed, daring young wife, desperate in her jealousy, anxious to break Elaine Willoughby's lines and guide her husband into the heart of the Sugar forces, she had merely broken the *convenances*, nothing more.

"For only a cur dare ever hint at the stolen visits. Club and coterie would brand the man as a hound who dared to boast of such a desperate confidence in a man's honor.

"No. The Lady of the Red Rose, bright, daring and stormy-hearted like many another *fin de siècle* New York wife, was safe.

Safe by all the laws of manhood and honor. And, in all the gay life he had led, he had only met the easy abandon of high life.

The loosening of restraint of a democratic luxury. He well knew that the Dickie Doubledays and the Tottie Thistledowns did not weigh in the scale against a real flesh and blood womanhood. They were only

bright, lurid beacons, warning signals on the seas of life, stranded on the reefs of human weakness, and with shoals of foolish virgins following on in their daring footsteps.

When he lifted his head, the stroke of twelve brought Miss Romaine Garland, with bowed head, before him, awaiting her daily dismissal.

He had never dared to use the busy hours from nine to twelve for any covert approach upon the stately girl's confidence. There, too, was the clear-eyed Mary Kelly.

The rapturous verdict of Jimmy Potter was confirmed as he glanced at the young goddess, her brown hair rippling from a pure Greek brow, her dark eyes dreaming under their lashes, and her pale, proud face at rest, with all the untroubled peace of maidenhood.

In her plain, dark dress, her sculptured form was deliciously intimated. Her voice, sweet and low as the breath of forest winds, awoke his hungering curiosity. It was *temps de relâche*.

Here was the very chance to begin to mold her to his will. To awake her latent love of luxury, to lead her out step by step into the confidential delights of wine and song, and to find out the shady places where Love lurks, an archer unawares. Yes. He would begin to mold this woman to his will.

Vreeland desired to let the loneliness of a great city aid him in his easy approach. And to hurry slowly and be wise. He had noted the friendly cordiality of the two young women. "If the new assistant would only play into his hands, and help to outwit the pale spy.

"If she can throw this little spy off her guard—if I can get them both to begin to enjoy themselves a

little, and then drop into an easy, hidden intimacy with Miss Romaine, then my patroness' little spy game here will be useless.

"For, if that woman learned to love a man, she would go through fire and water for him."

The throbbing of his heart made his voice tremble, and the veiled purpose of his crafty soul crept into his eyes, though they only rested on her superbly molded arms and slender, delicate hands, when he carelessly said: "If you would kindly leave me your private address, Miss Garland, I might need it. There may be some extra call of duty. I might wish to communicate with you."

There was a slight flush upon her cheek as the delicate lips slowly parted.

"I live at some distance, Mr. Vreeland, with private friends, and it would be impossible for me to render you any other services than as arranged. I have no one to escort me, and I never receive visitors." The voice was as cold as the glacier's rills.

Her beauty shone out as pure as an Easter lily, when she simply said: "Miss Kelly will, however, send any communication you might have to make. I am an absolute stranger in New York. The references which I gave Miss Marble are from old friends in Buffalo. I can, however, at all times, stay as late as Miss Kelly does, on any occasion when you may have overwork."

The young Diana's pure brow was loftily brave in its innocence.

Vreeland's eyes hungrily followed her as she moved quietly away in answer to his grave bow of dismissal.

"More time. More time," he murmured. "If I could find some way to gain her personal confidence. Flowers, books, little attentions, a stray set of theatre

or opera tickets. For she is, after all, only a woman. Fit to reign, royal in youth, and serving without stooping.

"I must see Miss Marble. The ice once broken, perhaps—"

He mused long upon an ingenious plan to "brighten the life" of the woman he would use as a tool. "Yes, it can be done, easily, through the Marble." And he knew that veteran traitress would aid him for money.

The week before the day of Mrs. Willoughby's ceremonial dinner was wasted by Vreeland in some amateur detective work. Miss Justine Duprez easily diagnosed the growing friendship of the two young girls.

For Miss Garland's sweet, tender face was already familiar in the little household where Mary Kelly's mother watched and wondered from what fairyland this bright-faced nymph had descended.

A stout school lad of sixteen was an efficient home escort for the young neophyte in New York, and pride filled the eyes of Mary Kelly's brother.

Vreeland felt all the growing charm of the steadfast girl's influence, her cultured manners, her dainty refinement and the rare delicacy of her language and taste. He valued her as of superior clay.

"Not of common stock," he murmured as he deftly trod along her path, with a veiled impatience. He was deep now in the last details of a plan which busied Justine Duprez, for the coming of the second Senator, the open splendors of the grand dinner party as elaborated by Justine warned him that if he would cut the secret channels so vital to his success, he must bring the janitor and postal carriers of the "Circassia" under control.



Justine, checking his headlong impatience, only smiled her velvety smile and whispered, "Give me some money to hoodwink them a little. Wait only for a few days, and trust to me. Have I ever failed you?"

When the "rising and successful man," Mr. Harold Vreeland, dressed himself with unusual distinction for Mrs. Willoughby's regal dinner party of twenty, there was all the happiness of a new-born hope in his heart. For he was nearly ready now "to move on the enemy's works."

That experienced "broker in young womanly talent," Miss Marble, had earned herself a pretty diamond lace pin, and "an authorization to proceed," by her ingenious plan of drawing out "Miss Romaine Garland." The experienced lady had smiled at all his first crude attempts.

"You were too abrupt. There is the awkward fact before her eyes always, that you are her employer. She acts on the mere defensive.

"The proprieties you surely know. Now, you are far too young and charming as a man," she blushing said, "to be a safe benefactor for this glowing-hearted girl with her sweet, tender eyes.

"She is a rare beauty and frankly good, and untinged as yet with the fires of Babylon. I have some showy friends of some influence, and, as she trusts me blindly, I will 'have warm-hearted civilities' extended to her.

"You will have her home address now, in return for my pretty pin. Never go there. You would ruin all.

"But, sir, you shall be drawn in as a guest to our little friendly coteries. She must be led into our allied camp gradually.

"You, by hazard, will appear as an old intimate, here

and there, when her shyness is worn off and, on that friendly and neutral ground, you can soon warm the marble into life." The Marble had a crafty and glowing heart.

The sly woman smiled. "No lonely young woman can resist long-continued and unobtrusive kindness. It always disarms. Let me have the means to lead her along into little pleasures. Once the taste of the easy evening outing life comes upon her, then, bit by bit, she will be as wax in my hands. You can meet her, by chance, at the theatres or operas when out with me. I will have a little supper given at some friend's home. We can drop off the friends one by one. I cling to her.

"You can then drop me off, when we are sure that the taste of pleasure is gently awakened, and you are free to then show her all your generous liberality. Take her home to your daily life, then once that the confidential relation is established—" Vreeland's eyes gleamed in a coming triumph. The way shone out, "straight and sweet," before him. Miss Joanna, you are a good fairy, and a keen-witted genius. I will give you *carte blanche* to lead her out along the rosy path, step by step, and a path that leads always toward me."

Mr. Harold Vreeland moved on serenely and laid his pitfalls for the pure young girl, whom chance had thrown in his way, with no compunction. In the blighted career of his own dishonored father, he had only despised the weaknesses which led to failure.

He had seen the downfall of Hathorn without a throb of sympathy and he resented the frank, honest predilection which was now leading the warm-hearted Potter to screen Alida Hathorn from a mob of cold-hearted "woman eaters" in honorable marriage.

Mean at heart, he even doubted the past life of the woman who had lifted him up to luxury. He hated her now only that his charms of person and manner had not brought her to his feet, a willing dupe.

• “She seemed to be impressed at first,” he mused. “But the shock of Hathorn’s cold abandonment in his little tiger cat wife’s jealous frenzy seems to have turned her against man, for a time.

“But, let me only get a hold on her. I do not care to be the star actor in a modern ‘Romance of a Poor Young Man.’ She shall not shake me off.”

He plotted deliberately against her peace—his generous benefactress. “First, the tapping of the private lines. Then, to mold Romaine Garland to my will. If she does not yield to Joanna Marble’s smooth ways, then out into the streets of New York.

“There are others, more complaisant; but to awaken those dark eyes to pleasure’s glow. To have them quicken at my coming.”

It was with these “undreamed dreams” haunting him that Harold Vreeland arrived, in sedate splendor, at the “Circassia,” where “the feast was set” for Senator Alynton and that Western wonder of recent occultation, Senator-elect James Garston.

In the kaleidoscopic splendors of the drawing-room, where manly eyes gleamed upon the beauties of splendid womanhood, among the fair daughters of Eve he missed that brilliant blonde heiress, Miss Katharine VanDyke Norreys. A tap from Mrs. Volney McMorris’ fan recalled him.

“I know that you are looking for her,” whispered the radiant duenna. “Katharine is a sort of ward of Senator Garston. He is her trustee. They all come together. I must have a word with you about poor—”

The entrance of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby brought the splendid circle around her, there where gleaming lights and the breath of matchless flowers, where diamonds and brightest eyes, where ivory bosoms and shapely silver shoulders were mingling charms of a modern Paradise of throbbing, hungry hearts.

Doctor Alberg's gloved hand was resting in Vreeland's palm—he was whispering, "You and I and Justine must watch"—when the calm, passionless face of Senator Alynton, with Miss Katharine Norreys on his arm, appeared.

There was a hum of astonishment, of frank self-surrender to the Occidental beauty's charms as Alynton gravely presented a tall, stately stranger, whose slightly silvered hair and chevalieresque bearing recalled the "Silver King."

"My friend, Senator James Garston," began Alynton, but there was a crowd of a dozen men eagerly stretching willing arms, as Elaine Willoughby's face contracted in a spasm of pain, and she fell senseless into Doctor Alberg's firm grasp. "Only the old heart trouble. In five minutes madame will be herself," suavely announced the doctor. "Perhaps a bit too tightly laced," he whispered to Mrs. McMorris.

It was a stately function, the dinner, which proceeded in a solemn splendor.

Senator James Garston was gravely attentive at the hostess' left, and only Vreeland knew when the lights were low that Garston had whispered, "I must see you, at once."

And with pale lips Elaine Willoughby had murmured, "At Lakemere, and to-morrow."

Justine had gained her long-needed clue.

## CHAPTER X.

## AN INTERVIEW AT LAKEMERE—SOME INGENUOUS MECHANISM.—“WHOSE PICTURE IS THAT?”

Harold Vreeland was seated in a blaze of light, in his own rooms at four in the morning, anxiously awaiting a night visit from one who might unravel the whole mystery while the lonely Elaine Willoughby lay helpless in her secluded rooms, feebly struggling toward a return of her self-control.

“What new devil’s jugglery is this?” muttered Vreeland, pausing in his wolf stride. He carefully recalled every action of the newly-made Senator and yet he was baffled at every turn. “Was the newcomer an agent of a morose husband, an old lover, or an unwelcome apparition from the clouded past?” He was baffled.

For, he began to realize how baseless were his meaner suspicions of the past. There had been no unworthy love between Elaine and Hathorn. The devil’s poison of slander alone had excited Alida’s burning jealousy. She herself had only sought “a dead straight point” in the daring visit to his rooms. Elaine’s record was clear so far. “Was it only an old sorrow?” He pondered long. Even the pale-faced, proud girl, whom he would trap, so far had hugged her honest poverty to a stainless bosom.

“I’ve been dead wrong on Alynton’s game all along. There’s neither an old love, nor a new intrigue, there,” he growled. “Justine has clearly proved that. Their union is only to be termed, ‘strictly business.’”



"And the Senator's frank, brotherly concern at Elaine's sudden illness went no farther than Colonel Barton Grahame's sympathy, Judge Endicott's alarm, or my own undisguised interest. Here is a new jack-in-the-box. I must watch Senator Garston."

It had been a galling mortification to Vreeland in the past, that faintly disguised disdain of Senator David Alynton, who had always practically ignored him.

But, this new statesman, sturdy James Garston, had brought to their meeting an unfeigned western *bonhomie*.

The newcomer had sought him out eagerly. He had drawn the younger man aside, in a lull of the entertainment.

"We must meet and talk over western matters; we have the world's coming treasury out there," largely remarked the new Senator-elect.

"I am housed at the Plaza, to be near Miss Norreys, who is at the Savoy. I shall stay here a few days, and, we will have a luncheon together."

In fact the acute Mrs. Volney McMorris had very deftly arranged it, for she was eager to matronize the resplendent Miss Norreys, to bask in the smile of this rising financial sun, and to have her own private chat with the young Fortunatus about the vanished Lady of the Red Rose. Her prompt social fastening upon Mrs. Willoughby, was only a grim proof that "the one who goes is happier than the one that's left behind."

The new Senator's round bullet-head, his curved beak-like nose, his uncertain gray eye and unsmiling lips marked him as a man of power.

He bore in every movement the badge of hard-won success.

His fifty-one years had marked him lightly, and, lawyer, mine owner, and capitalist, he was riding into the Senate on a chariot with golden wheels. It is the West that holds now the American sceptre.

Vreeland had watched Garston keenly at the dinner and noted his poised manner, his brilliant flashes of silence, and the grave, undisturbed courtesy of his demeanor toward the marble-faced hostess. "A man of a level head," was Vreeland's verdict. And he tried to read the secret of Garston's imploring glances.

There had been no lingering cloud over the table, and no shade of Banquo was evoked to chill the later merriment. Love, veiled and unveiled, deftly footed it, among the revelers, and, only Doctor Alberg's steady eyes, anxiously fixed upon his "star" patient, proved that but one, besides Vreeland, realized the desperate battle against Time which Elaine Willoughby was fighting out to the last. The egoistic revelers imagined their hostess' seizure to be a mere passing weakness. They all knew the strain of the exhausting New York season.

"Charming woman, our hostess," frankly remarked Senator Garston to Vreeland. "Type all unknown to our modest Marthas of the Occident. Here in America, our women will soon be crowned queens, if I may trust to the 'tiara' bearing stories of the society journals." And a casual remark from Vreeland brought out the admission that Senator Garston had never before met the hostess. "It was to my colleague, Alynton, that I owe the honor of this presentation," said the newly-made toga wearer. "And, as Mrs. Willoughby has been so kind to my ward, Miss Norreys, in this new acquaintance, both pleasure and duty join hands."

But, the startled Vreeland, pacing his silent room had several times exclaimed, in his lonely rounds while waiting for Alberg, "James Garston, you are a cool-headed, thorough-paced liar! I will trace you back, my occidental friend, only to find 'the wires crossed,' somewhere in the past, and, from you, I will yet wrench the secret of Elaine Willoughby's early life. Her child! Yes," he cried, "It might well be." He was thrilling in every fibre, for, in the dressing room, Justine had stolen to his side whispering:

"Doctor Alberg has sent for a trained nurse to help me watch with her to-night. Be on your guard.

"When this new Senator had made his adieu, I was hidden behind the curtain in the long hall. I saw him neatly drop his glove, as if by accident. Alynton and that tall golden-haired girl were waiting outside as he stole back." The French woman fairly hissed, "He is the man to fear. I am sure they are old lovers. For, he caught her by both hands and fairly devoured her with his eyes.

" 'To-morrow, alone, at Lakemere,' she said. *Voilà!* Milady. Just a woman, like the rest of us."

"Justine, that paper, the one in her corset. A thousand dollars for a copy of it."

"I will get it to-night!" the velvet-eyed spy cried.

"Go now. You will hear from me soon. Don't leave your room for a moment, and, *gare la* Kelly. She reports daily on you to our full-blown *ingenue*. Whatever turns up, you will surely hear from me. I'll earn your money yet."

It was five o'clock when the haggard German physician crawled up Vreeland's stair. He was worn and exhausted.

"I've had a night of it," he savagely cried, "give me

a glass of real brandy. No slops. That poor devil of a woman has had fainting fits one after the other. I've now got Martha Wilmot, my only really reliable nurse, watching her. The devil of it is, Madame will go up to Lakemere at ten o'clock, and she vows she will, alone. The house there is shut up. It is not even properly warmed. She will come back, and have a relapse, but what can I do. She has an iron will."

The angry Teuton drank a second dram and then relapsed into a sullen silence.

"Alberg, my boy, you are a good doctor, but, you don't know women, only your blue-eyed, clumsy frauleins, over there. This American woman is made of fire and flame. Tell me, what sort of a person is your nurse, Wilmot?"

"She's a good one—an 'out and outer.' She goes home to England next week. She has some ideas of her own to work out over there."

"Tell that smart woman to slip down here and see me before our patient comes back. I'll be here from four to seven to-day. And, mind that you put her 'dead on' to me, as the holder of a hundred pound note for her."

"Good," grunted Alberg.

"And, now, my son of Galen, what was it that upset Mrs. Willoughby?" Vreeland was eagerly studying the German's face.

"The old thing. She has raved all night about her child. I only brought her out of the attack with the strongest anti-spasmodics that man dare to use, short of clear cold murder. It's a terrible risk," sighed Alberg.

When Doctor Hugo Alberg left the Elmleaf, he was under the spell of his lying coadjutor, and richer by a

few hundred dollars. "This fellow must never even lift the veil of the Temple," muttered Vreeland. "Only trust to Justine. Only Justine," he cried, as he threw himself down to sleep, after ordering the wondering Bagley to send Miss Kelly home on her arrival, and also that dark-eyed enigma, Miss Garland. He needed solitude.

"I am ill, and, must have a long sleep. You can take a day off yourself. Clear out for the day and don't let me hear a single footfall about my rooms," were the staccato injunctions of the excited schemer.

"If that nurse only comes," he murmured, as he closed his weary eyes.

It was eleven o'clock when a light step echoed in Vreeland's hall, and the swishing sound of Justine Duprez's robe made the banker leap to his door. The French girl had her will at last. She stood amid the splendors of Vreeland's veiled Paradise—her lover's home.

She cried out in glee, "Thank God! She is out of the way. I came here from the train. She absolutely forbade me to go with her. I have had the janitor's boy watching all the trains. This Senator Garston went up the road an hour ago. The smart boy helped us last night in the cloak rooms, and, so, they are off alone together, up there, to-day."

Vreeland's eyes blazed in a mighty triumph. "To-night, you must help me, Justine," cried the eager schemer.

"See here. I already have stolen what you want," cried Justine. "You said it was worth a thousand dollars. I copied even every mark on the hidden papers, and, I went over it a dozen times, while the new nurse was with her. Madame was insensible, and, I had



time to work in safety. What will you give me, now?"

She was not listened too, for with a ferocious joy, Vreeland leaped up, crying, "My God! I have her now. They are all in the hollow of my hand."

He had glanced over the list of names written there, and a row of figures with some characters added, which seemed to glow before him in living flame.

He drew the Frenchwoman to his side, and there dashed off a check to his own order and carefully indorsed it.

"There's your money, you jewel," he gasped. "Listen. To-night, when she comes back, or to-morrow night, if she is again under the nurse's watch, you must steal that envelope again. I will be waiting outside the Circassia, and stay all of both nights till I get the original paper that you copied. Put a simple sheet of blank paper back in the envelope and close it up. Sew it up again in the same place in her corset.

"We will leave that to be stolen by the nurse, Martha Wilmot. She will know what to do with it.

"She clears out of here for Europe in a few days. She will keep well out of Mrs. Willoughby's way. And, so the Madame will think that she has been robbed by our sly, English friend. I will pay the nurse well and help her away. But that *original paper* must come to me.

"Be sure to leave Mrs. Willoughby's garments where the nurse could easily reach them—no one shall suspect you. I'll hold you safe—it is our own secret. Alberg will, of course, raise a devil of a row about the nurse clearing out, and robbing him, but only after she is gone."

"And my mistress. *Mon Dieu!* But, how I fear her!" faltered the trembling Justine.

"Nonsense. The woman comes down here to-day. She will get her orders from me. You can put this blank envelope with its paper filling back in the corset, so that Mrs. Willoughby will feel that something is there. And, now, about tapping her telephone and telegraph wires."

Justine had finished a glass of wine when she sprang to her feet. "To-day is the day of days. The janitor, August Helms, is all ready to tie on the wires to tap her telegraph and telephone. Come up to the Circassia at noon. I will take you into his room by the back way. He has arranged all with Mulholland, one of the two letter-carriers, to always delay Mrs. Willoughby's mail by one delivery. Mulholland can hold them all for himself to handle. And, Helms, in his room, will then open and copy any we need. He is a German adept in letter opening."

"You are a genius, Justine," cried Vreeland. "You can bring Helms down to your own room in South Fifth Avenue and there you and I together can square up with him. We must be two to his one. This is the very day of days while she is fondly lingering at Lake-mere with her own oldest lover.

"And now, my girl, take a good look around my den and then get out of here. It is too dangerous for us.

"For, you must never come here again. The janitor has sharp eyes."

"Yes, and, the new 'Mees Gairland' is many evenings now, with that little Kelly devil. Look out for them both. You can only trust me," nodded Justine, as she fled away, whispering, "I will come down into the court of the Circassia and meet you, in the entrance,

as if by hazard at noon precisely. All you have to do is to silently follow me. I will have that paper by midnight if I live and the nurse shall have the blame."

The rooms echoed to the laughter of hell as Vreeland's fiery devil whispered, "Victory!" He had at last solved the mystery of a "business syndicate" which made him tremble as he feared its name might escape his lips. The copied paper gave a list of names whose publication would shake a nation's counsels, and Garston's name was there.

So, tiger-like and triumphant, he waited for the hour to go and arrange for his secret stealing of his dupe's messages.

And, far away, at lonely Lakemere, where the trees now gleamed like ghastly silver skeletons of summer's glories, the winds wailed around the silent mansion where Elaine Willoughby stood face to face with the man who had come out of her dead past, an apparition as grim and awful to her as the rising of the sheeted dead.

It was the struggle to the death of two proud and world-hardened hearts. The secret of her blighted youth was face to face with her now. And, the shadow of a crime hung menacingly over James Garston, the toga wearer. A statesman of a clouded past—a past known only to the defiant woman facing him on her own battle-ground.

"I find you here under a stolen name, facing the world, as a living lie." The woman's scornful lips had lashed into his quivering heart. Garston, bold-brave, reckless now with a mad tide of desire sweeping over his reawakened heart, had seized her hands. He cried, passionately: "And, I find my lost wife, the

mother of our child, here, a lovely, and a glowing truth."

When he would have drawn her to him, she flung him off and dropped, a shaken Niöbe, into a chair, with her stormy tears raining over her beautiful, pallid face. That single word, "child," had disarmed her rising anger. For, she was facing one who knew all of the sealed past.

"My child, my child," she sobbed.

But, James Garston was on his knees before her now.

"*Our child*—Margaret! It can all be made right, now. Trust to me. Let me take you openly to my heart. Be my wife once more. Be a world's queen. I will make you happy."

Bold as he was, he shuddered, as she sprang to her feet. "You hound!" she bitterly cried, and then slowly turned, and walked unsteadily to the door. He had found a way to wring her heart at last, but her courage had returned. The wrongs of her youth burned in her bosom again.

"Hear me. You must! You shall!" he pleaded, seizing her in his strong arms. "I knew not even the horn book of my own nature when we married as young fools marry." She had torn herself away from him, and stood at bay with an unutterable loathing hardening upon her face. "I am rich, now, a Senator to be, and the friend of your friends.

"You dare not openly defy me. For, I can publicly claim you as mine. I demand to see our child. I offer you myself—the matured man—a leader of men. I offer you a secured, honored place in Washington life. And, you need me, for I can throw down your house of cards. When Alynton told me of the wonder-worker, the Queen of the Street, the Lady of Lake-

mere, I was merely interested. But, when I saw you, last night, my heart leaped up. For mine you were, mine you are—mine you shall be.”

The strong man counted upon the physical subjection of the woman once reduced to be his loving vassal—the girl wife who had lain in his arms.

And, master of her destiny once, he would now bend her to his will again.

His eyes were burning, his breath came quickly, and he awaited the physical revulsion of a weakened womanhood.

“There is always the tie that binds—the child—and, she belongs by Nature’s bond to me.”

But, the man who coarsely counted upon “a previous condition of servitude” as establishing a valid claim upon the Lady of Lakemere, shivered under the cold scorn of her words, for the wife of his youth seated herself, and, gazing into his eyes with an unutterable contempt, read the death warrant of his hopes.

“Let me cast up our accounts, here, now, in my home, Arnold Cranstoun, on this winter day, in a solitude on which you shall never intrude again save when I call upon you.

“The dead past is buried. Let it rest. Dare not to cry *Resurgam!* I dismiss all your sneers as to Alynton, and, I fear not your circle. You are as yet, but a clumsy neophyte there.

“Know, once for all, that your friends are in my power, but they trust to me, and, I am more than worthy of their confidence.

“For another circle of men of boundless power also trust me—men who would not trust them, save through me, and, men who would resistlessly crush you at my bidding.



"I speak now for the woman who is dead.

"Margaret Cranstoun, the woman heart slain by your cowardice, the loving and tender girl-wife. Look back nineteen long years to see yourself the trusted bank-cashier, a rising man of thirty-two.

"I was then your slave, your loving slave, a wearer of self-forced heart shackles. I, the girl of seventeen, believed you to be my lover husband—a man among men."

Senator James Garston's head was bowed in his hands, as the accusing voice rang out. He heard the knell of his last hopes.

"A year later, when you basely fled, leaving me, the mother of your two months' old helpless girl to face the employers whom you had robbed in your hidden speculations, then, only then, I learned of your double life in New York. I knew that I was the innocent hostage of purity and honor. The screen of your dearest vices."

Garston groaned as the voice rose high in its scorn and Elaine Willoughby stood before him, with outstretched arm, an angel with a flaming sword, at the shut gates of his Lost Paradise.

"Where you fled to I knew not—I cared not, for, with young blood and a loving heart, I might even have shared the fate of a bold sinner.

"But a sneaking coward must learn that woman's heart condones not poltrooning nor meanness!

"You would now hold the dead past over my head—trumpet to the world your own story!" she cried. "I can easily confirm it. I have kept all your letters—the story of your crime, the papers and vouchers which were found in your New York room.

"Your letters of egoistic love, your later whining

apologies from your unknown Western haunt. And armed with these, *I* could chase James Garston from the Senate."

The suffering man sprang up. "Not so. I have a right to my name. I legally changed it years ago. The bank is long years out of existence; there is also the limitation of the past years. No one would believe you."

His voice was broken with helpless tears now.

"Look at me! look at me!" the splendid woman proudly cried. "Dare any man say that my life has been a lie? Hear my story.

"Starvation, cold charity or the ignominy of helpless dependence was all you left me. I put our babe away. I went out a toiler into the world. As a school teacher I drifted away to the far West, and only changed my name. I left our home to avoid the honest love of good men who would have married me for pity's sake. For men were good to the shamed widowed Margaret Cranstoun.

"My clean hands were still linked by law to the unpunished fugitive felon. *I am free now*, and I know that you never would dare to speak. I know your coward soul. A judicial decree that you are dead can be easily had; your eighteen years of absence makes that my legal right. Widow of the heart, I will be a widow by law. But your coward silence will continue.

"Where did I gain wealth? I see the question in your eyes. I became a school teacher at Leadville. A few acres of ground and a cottage were the first fruits of my savings.

"The kindly mountain gnomes worked for me, with fairy friendship.

"There was a million in carbonates under those

rocky slopes where I tempted the hardy flower to grow.

"Young yet—*beautiful then*—I became the ardent chase of men in marriage. My gold gilded my lonely life. Many wished to share it.

"I was made sadly wise, and I reaped my harvest of sorrows. Five years in Europe made me a woman of the world—an accomplished world wanderer. I have learned in these lonely years the delicious power of wealth.

"I followed your secret example. I legally changed my name to Elaine Willoughby. And my honest title is clearer than yours.

"I have an able lawyer to defend my rights, in whom you would find an implacable foe."

She paused and spoke the final doom of his hopes.

"Had you come to me, red-handed, but loving, I might have forgiven you, followed you—loved you even in your crime—and suffered all to shield the one beloved head. *I did love you once with my whole soul.*"

There was the sound of choking sobs, and in an instant, Garston was on his knees before her. The silence was broken by her faltering accents.

"But now, freed by Nature's reincarnation, loyal even yet to a dead past, I exult in the unchallenged ownership of my mind, body and soul. You would take to your bosom the woman you still find fair, rich, powerful and respected. *Never! Nature revolts!*

"For the starving outcast of the streets who sells herself for bread to the first chance comer were white as snow compared to the woman who would again sink to your level.

"Arnold Cranstoun, any man in the world but you may look on me with longing eyes.

*"Between us there is the gulf of your eternal shame!"*

Now, *leave me*. I fear you not! Let all else go on as fate ordains.

"Your silence will be assured, for fear will seal your lips. Let there be neither approach nor avoidance—simply the oblivion of the absolute divorce of all laws, God's, Nature's, and man's.

"Go now! If you ever seek to cross my path, beware! You may haunt the peopled solitudes around me and meet me as a chance acquaintance.

"Your 'society drill' will hold you in your place in the poor parade of this superficial life."

She dropped her eyes, and her impassioned voice echoed sadly on his ears. He was defeated, and an agony rent his heart.

"Let me do something for you, Margaret," he pleaded.

"I am above your power to aid," the proud woman replied.

"Let me atone," he begged.

"Dead beyond awakening is my heart, and you know it. Do not now add a hideous insult to Nature to your cowardly abandonment of the past."

The dull, level coldness of her voice proved to him that she bore a frozen heart, one never to awaken at his touch. He cast himself down before her in a last appeal.

And then, on his knees before the woman whom he had sworn to cherish "till death do us part," the strong man pleaded for the child whom fate had robbed from the clinging arms of its mother. Margaret Cranstoun sobbed:

"*The child!* Oh, my God! *Never!* Name not her name. Me, your victim or your sacrifice. Her name shall never cross your lips. Wherever God's mercy

takes that innocent one, she shall live and die fatherless—save for Him above. I swear it, on the memory of a mother's natal anguish. And *now*, Senator James Garston,—”

The stately woman stood before him with the menace of a life in her eyes.

“*This is the end of all!* Go! You are safe from my vengeance now. I care not how you have dragged yourself up on Fortune's wheel.

“Go! And if you ever break the sorrow-shaded stillness of my life, then, may God help you. For I will strike you down for the sake of that same fatherless child.”

A black storm of suddenly aroused jealousy swept over Garston's face.

“Your handsome lover Vreeland shall be my prey, my tool, my confidant. I will creep into your heart through your own pleasant vice. And, by God! *He shall find out the girl for me.*”

When James Garston's passion-blinded eyes cleared, he was standing there alone, and a sudden fear smote upon him.

The ghastly silence of the splendid deserted halls weighed upon him. He staggered out into the blinding snows, now falling, and crossed the park to where a sleigh waited at the garden gate.

He was half mad, as he wandered away under the trees, and he hurled away his revolver lest he should be tempted to die there before her windows.

“I have lost a woman upon whose breast a king's head might proudly rest,” he said to that ghost of his dead self which rose up to mock the man of mark, the millionaire. “And—*she loved me once.* Fool—fool—and—*blind fool!*” he muttered.

A mad resolve thrilled him now.



"The child! By God! *she would hide her. The world is not wide enough.* There's my money—and this young fellow Vreeland. I have a lure for him."

His busy brain thrilled with plots of the one revenge left to him. "I will steal away both child and lover!" he swore.

Senator Garston's face was sternly composed that night as he indited his invitation to the rising young banker to join him at the Plaza.

"Katie Norreys can soon twist him around her slim, white fingers—he is young and rash," the cold-hearted millionaire mused. "I am safe in Margaret's silence. My money will talk. My record is safe. I have made my calling and election sure. I'll get Vreeland into the fair Katie's hands.

"A little money will help. He shall be turned away from Margaret. Once that I have the girl, then Margaret will surely soften—for that child's sake. *By God! I'll buy the girl's heart!* I have money enough, and I'll outbid even Mrs. Elaine Willoughby."

The Senator-elect felt a new glow in his heart, the ardor of a wolf-like chase, an untiring chase, for love, passion, and vengeance carried him on.

"I'll live to laugh at her heroics yet," he cried, "for I will bring her into camp. *I am not accustomed to fail.*" He was resolute now.

The lights were gleaming golden in the Circassia when a pale-faced woman crept back to the splendors of the pearl boudoir.

No one had marked Senator James Garston's visit to Lakemere, and the two caretakers—man and wife—marveled at their mistress' agitation when she bade them escort her back to New York City. The gardener summoned to watch over the lonely mansion grumbled:

"I never saw her look like that." For the brave woman was now "paying the price." It was the reflex swing of the pendulum of Life.

Could the three humble servitors have heard the accusing cry of Elaine Willoughby's heart they would have known the anguish of a stricken woman's arraignment of Providence.

"And he—oh, my God! *He prospers*, while my child is taken from me! Is this the price of my mother's love, my empty heart, my vacant home, my death in life!"

It seemed as if God had spared the wrongdoer to smite her quivering mother heart.

Dr. Hugo Alberg and the stolid-faced Martha Wilmot were busily whispering in a corner of Mrs. Willoughby's sick room that night long after midnight had sounded on the frosty air.

For, relaxed and broken by the enforced bravery of her struggle with the father of her lost child, the Lady of Lakemere had crept, bruised and wounded in soul, back to die or live, she cared not, in the peopled wilderness of the two million souls who envied her the lonely luxuries of her life.

"She has had one dose," whispered Alberg. "She is dead safe to sleep till three o'clock. Give her this chloral carefully then. Get your work done as soon as you can, and at eight o'clock your expected telegram will call you away. The French woman will watch till the new nurse comes. You have seen young Vreeland?"

The Doctor's eyes glowed like live coals.

"Yes," she whispered. "*It's all right*," and her fingers tightly closed on the vial. "I am to meet him at the ferry. *The boat sails at eleven*. It will be all right."

Dr. Alberg passed out of the sick-room, and Justine Duprez followed him down the stair.

"You have left all where she can do the work?" whispered the miserly German, who already had the price of his treason in his pocket.

"Yes," murmured Justine. "I'll tell you all when we meet down there."

The hoodwinked physician went out into the night, whispering: "I'll be here at seven, on the watch."

It was but half an hour later that a man seated in August Helms' darkened basement room opened his arms as Justine Duprez glided in.

"She is sleeping like a log," murmured the maid. "*Here is what you want.* The nurse will do her part later, and be sure that she clears out at once. I'll keep the Doctor with me here till noon. She will get her 'sudden telegram;' he will be here on duty; while he is busied with the new nurse Martha will go and rob the Doctor's office and rooms, and be soon on the sea. Then we are all covered."

The schemer's eyes gleamed as he pocketed the paper which made his patroness an involuntary traitor to her dangerous trust. Vreeland breathed in a happy triumph.

"You must not leave your rooms to-morrow. Keep in sight of the Kelly girl," warned the Frenchwoman. "*Now I will steal away.*"

There were words murmured which bound the two wretches to each other, and they laughed as they pointed to the janitor's new telegraphic instrument and telephone.

"A great convenience to the patrons of the Circassia," laughed Vreeland. He alone knew how deftly the crafty August Helms had seized upon Mrs. Wil-

loughby's absence of the day to effect the joining of the skilfully hidden wires tapping the lines which led to the Hanover Bank building and joined Judge Endicott's private office to Mrs. Willoughby's pearl boudoir.

"When I have the extra instrument in my own room," he exulted, "then if Miss Romaine Garland is not approachable I will soon find another more malleable.

"But the secret firm of Endicott & Willoughby will talk into my ear when they think that the whole world is theirs. *It's a royal plan,*" he mused.

Justine's gliding step had died away when Harold Vreeland crept out like a guilty thief.

"Where shall I hide this original," he muttered, as he disappeared in the darkness. "*I must find a place in my rooms. I cannot carry it about me.*"

When he had regained the Elmleaf he dared hardly breathe as he carefully examined the original document which tied up the fate of the Sugar Syndicate with that of men whose very names he feared to utter.

"She is in my power at last. Her ruin is in my hands.

"And now to bring her into my arms to be my fond tool and willing slave."

There was no "stock plunging" for two long weeks, as the illness of Mrs. Willoughby dragged on, and Martha Wilmot was well across the seas before the police of New York City had ceased to blunder around after the ungrateful nurse who had seemingly robbed her benefactor's office and then decamped.

Mr. Harold Vreeland was astounded at the golden sunshine of Senator James Garston's favors which followed on that luncheon at the Plaza Hotel which had made him a sworn knight in the rosy chains of Miss Katharine VanDyke Norreys.

There was little to do, for the market was quiescent.

Miss Mary Kelly's desk, too, was vacant, for she lay at home ill with a fever, and it was at the side of the girl's sick-bed that Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, still feeble and shaken in soul, suddenly seized a photograph from the mantel. "Whose picture is this?" she cried, her voice trembling in the throes of an emotion which swept her loving soul with wonderment and a new hope.



## BOOK III—ON A LEE SHORE.

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### CHAPTER XI.

MISS MARBLE'S WATERLOO!—A LOST LAMB!—HER VACANT CHAIR.—SENATOR GARSTON'S DISCLOSURE.—SARA CONYERS' MISSION.—MISS GARLAND'S DISHONORABLE DISCHARGE.—A DEFIANCE TO THE DEATH.—“ROBBED!”

In the two weeks after the successful affixing of those snake-like coils of wire which led the private messages of Mme. Elaine Willoughby into janitor Helms' guarded private apartment, Mr. Harold Vreeland had effected a thorough understanding with that worthy. The trapping devices worked to a charm. All was now ready for a final betrayal.

Secure in his autocratic rule, August Helms buried his shock head in the beer seidl and tyrannized with a good-humored roughness over the cringing tradesmen visiting the Circassia, and, a greedy gossip, he made his “coign of vantage” a warm nook for letter-carrier and policeman and the high class “upper servants” of the families who lived above him, in a royal Americanized luxury in that great social fortress, the Circassia. Helms was a modern tyrant.

His round, gray-blue eye twinkled as Justine Duprez would slyly slip in and read off the printed tape of the Wheatstone instrument, a duplicate sender and receiver of the same pattern being neatly encased in a pretty

cabinet in the pearl boudoir above. And Mrs. Willoughby doubted, feared, suspected—nothing.

But all in vain did Helms record the telephoned messages which were trapped on the instrument which was his especial care. There was nothing to record of moment. A lull seemed to hover over every speculative interest of the convalescent woman.

The stillness of death now marked Mr. Harold Vreeland's "business department" at the Elmleaf. The illness of Mary Kelly had cut off all special communication with Mrs. Willoughby at the Circassia, and he had been forced to give Miss Romaine Garland a furlough "under full pay" until Mrs. Willoughby's trusted operator could resume her desk. The young girl shunned any *tête-à-tête* labors. It was in virtue of a warning from the acute Joanna Marble that Vreeland gravely bade his mysterious beauty rest herself and "await further orders."

"She is of the finer clay," warningly remarked Miss Joanna. "One toss of that proud head and she would be off like a startled fawn. You must trust to a woman—only a woman—to lead a woman on. Beware of rashness. You would lose her."

There was an *innocuous desuetude* now clinging to all Vreeland's crippled plans.

For, soberly attentive in his duty calls, he had left daily cards at the Circassia, supplemented with flowers whose dreaming beauty might have touched a heart less wrung than Elaine's.

Admitted but once to her presence, he marveled at the serious change in her appearance.

After receiving her orders, he now knew that he was free for a month to follow on his social pleasures and to watch, down in Wall Street, the executive

matters of the firm and note the gradual liquidation, dollar for dollar, of all proved claims against the defunct firm of Hathorn & Wolfe.

He recognized the cool-headed sifting of Mr. James Potter's lawyers, under the mandates of that young Cræsus in Paris.

"A fair, square settlement, dollar for dollar," was Potter's openly avowed business plan.

The last flurries of the sudden Sugar speculations had all died away, and Vreeland at last believed Mrs. Willoughby's description of the market.

"There is nothing in sight. I shall let all speculation alone until Dr. Alberg pronounces me able to stand business excitement. Your time is your own till I call you back to your post and send Miss Kelly down to her work again. She will act as my private secretary until I am thoroughly well."

And Vreeland, now fearful that he might be as suddenly dropped as Frederick Hathorn had been, forbore to press on the confidence of the woman whose thinned cheeks and hollow eyes told of some internal fires eating away her vitality. He was unable to extract any information of value from Dr. Hugo Alberg. And the thieving nurse was now safe over the sea—the robbery of the envelope still undiscovered.

The German medical worthy was really puzzled. In the secrecy of Vreeland's rooms he confided that though all the depression of the skillfully administered overdoses of chloral had worn away, his patient was wearing herself to the verge of a collapse.

"Mental trouble! mental trouble!" he growled. "Neither Justine nor my new nurse (whom I dare not fully trust) can gain the slightest clew to her sorrows. The Madame has grown cat-like, too, in her secretive

ways. There is old Endicott always hovering around, and that newspaper fellow, Hugh Conyers; and, besides, his raw-boned artist sister, Miss Sara, is closeted with her nearly every evening. What they are all up to is a devil's wonder.

"Are they plucking her of her gold? There is such a thing as social blackmail. Any lonely woman of fortune usually has a ring of hungry sycophants around her."

The German groaned helplessly. He wanted that same gold, and wanted it badly.

"And you, of course, think that you should be the king-pin of the whole machine," sneered Vreeland. The half-angered German snorted a warning.

"Look out for yourself," growled Alberg. "She does not let the French maid go out of her sight now, and her new nurse has not dared to leave. Remember, I will hold you responsible about the stolen envelope. I have covered up my own tracks."

And then he proudly exhibited the newspaper clipping headed, "An Ungrateful Protégé," which described the heartless pillaging of Dr. Alberg's office and rooms by "Miss Martha Wilmot," who had "decamped for parts unknown." The police detective opinions and the portentous interviews were all set out in extenso.

"When Milady finds that she was been robbed, too, then look out for squalls," was the parting admonition of the Doctor. It brought grave shadows to Vreeland's face.

Harold Vreeland was startled when his dupe left him. For it now flashed over him that his evening *cartes de visite* had lately only elicited the same stereotyped answer: "Mrs. Willoughby is too unwell to see anyone."

He had, however, "improved the shining hours" by a flank movement to the Hotel Savoy, where he had drifted far, very far, into the good graces of that sparkling heiress, Miss Katharine Norreys. And his daily welcome grew warmer with each visit. He was getting on famously.

Senator James Garston's absence "on Washington visits," with the usual trips of a busy money magnate from fever center to fever center of the golden whirlpool, had left the young man to "exploit" the many graces of the tall, willowy blonde. He had often mused over the possibility of an advantageous alliance. "Here is a woman, young, rich, and with a powerful Senatorial backing. I might even be able to get inside the ring. For now I hold the secret of a combination which no one dares avow. It would be my ruin, however, to use it until the time comes to rule or crush Mrs. Willoughby. She must be my 'golden goose'—she alone—and, I must not kill her too soon."

A long introspection proved to him that his old "waiting game" was the only safe plan.

"If Garston makes up to me, I can meet him half way. Perhaps he might exchange the secret of my sly patroness' early life for the golden key to the Sugar situation. Together we could surely control her. And acting alone, I might easily be crushed between this secretly warring couple.

"But, when their dual secret is mine, then I can always act against my weakest foe. They will never dare get rid of me then," he craftily premised, for he saw gold ahead—solid, easily earned gold. And the busy devil in his cold heart laughed and made merry.

But one circumstance now disquieted him as to the



resplendent Miss Katharine VanDyke Norreys—the absence of a respectable, social womanly background.

There was no doubt as to the tangible luxury of her daily life, and the deep respect shown by the Hotel Savoy management spoke of that regular payment of bills which endears “the guest” to the Boniface.

“A certain number of women friends are a *sine qua non*, however, to a ‘professed beauty,’ ” mused Vreeland.

“Their absence is as remarkable as a bedizened general riding out all alone into the enemy’s land with no following. I presume that ‘prominent Westerners’ will in due time furnish her with a golden woman body-guard. Garston being a widower, too, is another awkward thing.”

In the whole embarrassing situation, all that Vreeland could do to move on his plans was to make a stolen visit to the rooms of the janitor of the Circassia.

There Justine Duprez, in a few moments of stolen time, breathlessly told him of the nightly conferences. “I think that she is soon going abroad. They have maps and papers out every evening. So far she has not examined her hidden paper. When she does, there will be a wild storm.

“And then only at my room in South Fifth Avenue dare we meet. We must be watchful. For the little green-eyed typewriter, Mary Kelly, spies on me, and I find her blue-coated friend, too, that big policeman, Daly the Roundsman, following me around. Look out for yourself. You and I must stand or fall together. She may give us both the slip. If she went over to Paris, and took me with her, you dare not follow her; but I could write to you always, and give you a safe address to write to me.”

Vreeland was vaguely disturbed at heart.

"Can we trust to August Helms?" muttered Vreeland, with a sudden shiver of underlying cowardice.

"Yes," grimly said Justine, "as long as you pay him, and, besides, he faces state's prison in—you know—his own part of the business. We must stand together firmly, and you lead us on."

As Vreeland regained his deserted rooms in the Elmleaf he strangely recalled the last bitter denunciation of the Lady of the Red Rose: "I leave it to the future to punish you."

But on his table, two letters awaited him which brought a glow of secret delight to his heart.

A note from Senator James Garston bidding him name a day for a *tête-à-tête* dinner at the Plaza closed with these words of hope:

"I wish to enlist you in some matters of moment which may turn out to our mutual advantage. You are just the kind of a man that I feel I can work with. Please telegraph the date to me at the Arlington Hotel, Washington, and I will meet you—the sooner the better.

"It is unnecessary to say that this is a matter leading to a strictly confidential business association, and so, not a word of my coming, even to Miss Norreys.

"I wish to see you alone, and if you will act with me we shall both soon be busy.

"Just the leading card to draw him into my hands. If he will only unbosom himself ever so little, then I can soon tie Mrs. Willoughby down, for this is the man she fears. Else why that stolen interview at Lake-mere? And from all knowledge of that, even Justine

was excluded. Let him but come forward, and they are both mine."

The second letter with its inclosure was the result of a long struggle between Miss Joanna Marble and the social reluctance of that "shy bird," the stately Miss Romaine Garland. Joanna had gained ground at last.

Vreeland smiled grimly as he read the corrupt agent's letter. It was an evening invitation couched in his interest and skillfully arranged.

"You are to come at 10:30, sir—fashionable hours. You will find me ready to greet you.

"The musicale and supper, with a little informal dancing, will enable me to see that you escort Miss Garland home. I shall be 'suddenly indisposed,' and then you are easily the Prince Charming of the occasion.

"The hostess is a trusted friend of mine.

"But how 'shy' your beautiful bird is. Romaine has called several times on me, and yet she will not give me her personal address. She always receives her letters at Station Q, General Delivery.

"And when I offered to come for her she said, quietly: 'I will call for you, dear Miss Marble, with a carriage, and we can go together.' I wonder is she one of us after all—a *shy* bird, not a *shy* bird?"

The address given was that of a respectably situated residence in the West Eighties, a 'region blessed with slightly stiffening social aspirations toward "elitedom,"' as the journals deftly put it.

Senator James Garston in Washington was triumphant as he read Vreeland's dispatch fixing a date for the private dinner. "I can easily tole this vain young fellow on with Katharine," he gleefully cried. "And if I can only reach Margaret Cranstoun's child, I will soon bring her proud head back to my bosom."

The stern soldier of fortune mused long over olden days, his days of youth and promise, when his girl-wife was only a plighted bride, a woman of awakened heart, "whose head, like an o'er-wearied dove, came fluttering down to rest."

"I will have them both," the Senator swore. "Why should my life's harvest be but chaff?"

"For, the child is mine. The mother was once mine, and through fire and flood I'll go on and prove my title against the whole world.

"If this young favorite can only find me the hidden girl, he shall not want for fortune, and a marriage with Katharine Norreys will tie him forever to me."

It all promised fair enough.

But, plot and counterplot was forgotten as Harold Vreeland, superbly poised in his habitual adamantine calm, edged his way into the listening circle of the "select few" who had been gathered at Mrs. Ollie Manson's ambitious musicale. It was a gala evening in the West End.

A furtive conference with Miss Marble had caused him to slip into the hushed rooms during the period when the *convives* were hanging breathlessly upon Miss Bettina Goldvogel's rendering of "Beauty's Eyes." The Prince Charming's advent was unobserved.

When the music ceased, Vreeland, who had been gazing upon Romaine Garland, a sweet and lonely figure, seated there with her hands clasped and her stately head bent, was alarmed as he pressed forward through the unfamiliar throng.

There was a flush of sudden crimson on the tall girl's cheek, and then, a swift Diana, she passed on, a vision of stately beauty in her unfamiliar evening dress. The excited trickster was swift in her pursuit.



Vreeland's step was on the stair, but a warning touch at once recalled him. With serpentine swing, Miss Joanna Marble sought the secret precincts of the robing rooms. "Let me handle this matter," was the whispered comment. "Wait below in the drawing-room."

The effusive welcome of Mrs. Ollie Manson was lost upon the man who had caught one glance of aversion from those truthful eyes into which his veiled blandishments had never brought one gleam of tenderness in those long hours at the Elmleaf. "Had she taken the alarm?"

When he was released from the little circle with its *sotto voce* comments, "Clubman," "Rich young banker, my dear," and other social incense, he saw the thin, bewhiskered Mr. Solon Manson, with a startled expression, handing Miss Romaine Garland down the front steps to her waiting carriage.

It was a five minutes of agony, and the last strains of "*Non è Ver*" had reverberated from Sig. Trombonini's swelling bosom before Miss Joanna Marble, her face ashen with the pallor of rage, drew Vreeland into the library.

"You'll never see that young tragedy queen again," wrathfully whispered the angered woman. "She only told her driver to take her to the elevated railroad station at Ninetieth Street. I had posted the little Manson to get her address.

"There must be someone nearer to her than you ever will be. She is as deep as the sea, and she dared to lash me with her icy tongue. 'I see it all, Miss Marble,' she snapped out. 'Your friendly invitation was a lure to put me on a false basis with my elegant employer.



“‘You know the girl breadwinner has no protection against such a man but the honest independence of her daily labor. Should he bend to woo the woman who stands mute before him daily, pencil in hand? I can not meet my employer socially.’”

“And you?” breathlessly cried Vreeland.

“I stood mute; for I dared go no further. But I have her picture, at any rate. I will have her secretly shadowed.

“I will wager my head there is some one nearer and dearer to the shy bird than Miss Majestic would have me believe. You can’t blame me; I did my best. But it has been a Waterloo.”

The listener swore a mighty oath in his sudden jealous rage. Vreeland’s face hardened.

“See here, just lock her picture up in your private safe. Do nothing—wait for me. I’ll follow up the quest alone.”

“And there is five hundred dollars for your obedience, and now, silence. I’ll stay here an hour and jolly these people.”

“To-morrow at ten at your office. And if you should meet her, simply ignore the matter.

“I shall tell her, of course, that Manson, an old friend, asked me informally, and that our meeting was brought about by pure chance.”

Miss Joanna Marble’s hard laugh rattled in her “bony frame.” “I think our *ingenue*, young as she is, has already a little commencement of a ‘past,’ a little ‘jardin secret,’ where flowers of other days still bloom.

“But I am in your hands. I will obey you. You are the paymaster, and you know I am not ‘in business for my health.’”

On his homeward way, Vreeland studied the stars with an anxious brow.

"She shall not get away from me," he swore. "I wonder if Mary Kelly and she are now only duplicate spies of the woman who once had a use for me, and now fears the poor tools she has used. Did I get at the whole Hathorn secret?"

"That is forever sealed in poor Fred's grave."

He started as a brilliant golden star trailed over the inky blackness of the night.

"That's bad luck," he gloomily reflected, as he cursed the wary young girl's divination of his clumsy social trick. "It was a wretched botch," he said, as he angrily dismounted at his own door, and the failure over-shadowed his gloomy slumbers.

Three days later, when Harold Vreeland gazed across the dinner table at Senator James Garston's immutable face, he wondered what future intrigues were hidden behind the mask of the strong man's assumed carelessness. They were alone, hidden in a retired room of the Millionaires' Club, and, as of old, Harold Vreeland, played his waiting game. The two men were fairly matched—past masters of deceit.

Greed, ambition, revenge, a desire to reach the gilded coterie of New York's *crème de la crème*, all these motives Vreeland suspected, but not that an old love, revived in a burning passion, a mad desire for repossession, thrilled the hardened heart of the man "who had once thrown a pearl away, richer than all his tribe."

Vreeland was wary and yet uneasy. His heart's desire, easily won wealth, now seemed to recede, like the pot of gold buried beneath the rainbow. He swore to make no mistake in the impending deal.

After a long mental debate, he had decided upon separate hiding places for the copy and the original of the one document, which, a two-edged scimeter, gave him a crushing control, he fondly fancied, over Alynton, Garston, and also the Lady of Lakemere.

"I must be careful," he mused. Either of the men would be a relentless foe, and to him Mrs. Willoughby, now represented only incarnated dollars and cents. Lucre, not love.

With all his deeply-laid plots, he was baffled at all points, for his own rooms were still every day deserted save by the adroit valet.

With tears of rage, Miss Joanna Marble gave up to him the picture of Romaine Garland, the one visible token of that young Diana's existence.

"I have failed, and even the Mansons can get no trace. I have even sent the picture around among all the hackmen as far as the Harlem River," was Joanna's meager report. "The girl has simply vanished and left no trace behind.

"The man who 'began her past' for her has probably spirited the young vixen away. It was a masterly change of base, for she, sly one, took wing at once on recognizing that you would like to be something more than an employer."

And so, with orders for a redoubled energy in research, and the hope of a glittering reward, Joanna Marble returned to her mart of souls and her veiled brokerage of innocence.

A comprehensive business letter from Mrs. Elaine Willoughby had at last directed Mr. Harold Vreeland to relieve Horton Wyman as general supervisor of the firm. The veiled steel hand under the velvet glove was concealed there.

"You will have ample assistance in Noel Endicott and Maitland. Your partner needs a few weeks' rest. Anything private will, of course, be communicated to you by Judge Endicott. I shall await my own delayed recovery, and perhaps, a fortnight at Lakemere may restore me.

"Of course, as I shall keep Miss Kelly with me, there will be no business transacted uptown. I only depend upon you now for a daily watch during business hours of the firm's affairs. As Noel Endicott has been made a Stock Exchange member, he will handle the Board matters, and you will hear my orders from Judge Endicott through him."

The letter was curt, chilling, and still courteous. It was however a polite closing of the social doors of the Circassia, and the anxious Vreeland, by a prompt evening call, soon verified the fact of the temporary absence of the woman who seemed to easily escape his toils. There was no one at his rooms to handle the concealed wires now.

And Justine Duprez, too, had been snapped away out of his sight by the unannounced departure of her mistress. He was helpless now to continue any effective espionage.

Even Helms, the janitor, mournfully shook his head. "The wires are all silent," he grumbled. "The mail, too, all now goes direct to Lakemere, and so I've nothing to tell you." But he wanted a handsome "temporary loan" just as usual.

A lurid ray of warning light soon gleamed upon Vreeland's path in a letter brought by Dr. Alberg from the beleaguered Frenchwoman. It was only a scrawl, but a scrawl of unmistakably grave import.

"There is danger hovering near, *mon amant*," she

warned. "The old judge, the newspaper man, and his ugly, raw-boned sister have all been here, with the Kelly, little green-eyed Irish devil, and the other girl, the pretty one, who was her assistant with you.

"*Dieu!* how handsome that woman is. But they are all gone away now save the old judge, who comes every day, going back at night, and the Kelly woman, who goes home Saturday night. The other girl went away at night with the two Conyers. Watch the Kelly. She may come down to your office to spy. I fear that Madame has already missed the paper. Remember, we must stand and fall together, you and I. If I ever find that dark-eyed beauty near you, some dark night, look out for a dash of vitriol in her pretty face. That's all. You would not dare to punish me! I will have no rivals! *You belong to me now!*" Vreeland groaned in his helpless rage.

Harold Vreeland's heart beat wildly as Senator Garston, after locking the door, drew two chairs into the middle of the room. He studied the young man's face and said slowly:

"Vreeland, I am now in a position to make a fortune for you. I can easily see that you depend on Mrs. Willoughby in some way. I want you to take a few moments to consider whether you will not put yourself unreservedly into my hands, and so, in helping me, help yourself. You know what the favor of rich women finally amounts to. The day that the wind blows cold you are left out in the street. But I can put you 'on velvet.' Now, don't speak too quickly. It is a very serious matter. You and I can work like men together, with no change of heart."

"What do you wish of me?" guardedly demanded Vreeland. "It must be nothing inimical to Mrs.



Willoughby's stock interests. I am no babbler, and no traitor."

"Your character is perfectly safe in my hands," half sneered Garston. "I merely want you to help me, and make your own future, while not injuring your lovely employer.

"I know already, through Alynton, that you're only a figurehead in the firm, and, by the way, he is pushing that nephew of his right in as fast as he can, between you and Mrs. Willoughby. He does not like you. A touch of jealousy." The chance shot told, and it cut Vreeland to the quick. Garston smiled sardonically.

Harold Vreeland's face was livid with rage as the strong man calmly gazed into his eyes and said: "If you have ever nourished the idea of managing Elaine Willoughby, you can dismiss it. The lady is some years your senior, and moreover, there may be prior claims. A man like you, with your present standing and possible future, should only mate with someone like Katharine Norreys. The maternal tinge to a marriage with an elder woman is not the thing for a man of your marked gifts, your position, and your career. You can do better. The afternoon sun of life has little real warmth in it. Be warned in time."

Vreeland sprang to his feet. "It seems that you are taking an unwarrantable liberty," he hotly protested. He had now dropped the waiting game—but he had fallen into able hands.

"Nonsense," calmly replied the Senator-elect. "You will be left out in the street in three months if you let the cold-hearted Alynton dominate that woman's changing mind. He wishes to marry her *himself*. I say that he shall not! Now, you see, our game is the

same. He has already enough power to displace you—for reasons entirely beyond your control.”

The words “Sugar syndicate” leaped to Vreeland’s pale lips, but he mastered himself. “Tell me the truth. Give me the whole game. Show me where you can secure me—and then I am your man. But I will not be paid off with fairy tales.” James Garston laughed easily.

“I am a good paymaster, and I’ve already learned my cue. Nothing for nothing in New York. I would never dare to trifle with a wideawake man like you,” and then Vreeland bowed and smiled.

“Then, what must I do for you?” demanded Vreeland, who was now thoroughly off his guard.

The Senator studied his man carefully. “I think that I’ll trust you,” he slowly said. Standing before his would-be dupe he said, carelessly. “I had supposed that you knew that Mrs. Willoughby was still bound in a marriage which would make all your season’s work ‘love’s labor lost.’ ”

The secret was out at last!

Vreeland’s eyes were downcast. He tried to guard his tell-tale face.

“And has a daughter now old enough to be a more fitting wife to you than even that Indian-summer beauty—the mother,” remorselessly continued the Senator, as Vreeland sprang to his feet in a torment.

“Now, I want you to find that daughter for me—and if you do, your fortune is made.” He quietly added: “You see the presence of that girl would spoil the Alynton marriage, and Elaine Willoughby has only a heart of stone. She has merely drawn Alynton on by an assumed resistance. My lady has played her cards

well. I want to find the girl—and break off that match—for business reasons.”

The flood of burning jealousy which swept over Vreeland's mind now washed away the last vestige of his calculating prudence. Alynton should never have the Lady of Lakemere.

For a moment a torturing, haunting resemblance was strangely made plain to him. And now he would hunt down that lost lamb which had escaped both himself and that thirsty she-wolf, Joanna Marble. There was a double motive for the chase now.

“Is that the girl whom you are searching for?” suddenly exclaimed the excited broker, as he thrust Romaine Garland's picture before the gaze of the astonished Western millionaire.

There was a cry—an echo of the buried past surging now from Garston's breast. The echo of a love long dead.

“By God! It is Margaret herself—at eighteen. Tell me—tell me—where did you get this?” He had seized Vreeland by both hands and the picture lay between them, smiling up at the excited men from the wine-stained table.

Vreeland bitterly thought of the vacant chair in his luxurious den—the chair that Romaine Garland had quitted forever. He began to see that plainly which as hitherto had only glimmered “as in a glass darkly.” And for a second time, Fate had dealt him a heavy blow. She had escaped him as scathless as the “Lady of the Red Rose.” He had a foothold left, however.

“That is my secret, sir,” sharply said Vreeland, as he wrenched himself loose, and pocketed the photograph sent “for inspection to Miss Marble.”

“And that secret is for sale to you, on fair conditions.”

"Let us make instant terms, Vreeland," cried Garston, dropping into a chair. He was eager now. He reached out for a glass of cognac.

"Your game is mine—and mine is yours. If you find that girl for me I'll make your fortune—I swear it. I'll put you into the strongest secret circle in America.

"You shall handle all my private affairs—but I must have a gage of your fidelity—even when I've paid the price."

He watched the breathless schemer, who faltered: "And that is, when you marry Katharine Norreys there will be no secrets between us. You shall have money now—but to open all the doors even to you of the 'Illuminati,' you must be mine in interest—forever." And then they opened their hearts to each other for the lust of gold, revenge and power.

The stars were low in the west before the two wary adversaries had chaffered along to a reasonable basis of bargain and sale.

"To-morrow—I ask only till to-morrow to think all over," was the truce which parted them. And so each knew no more of the other's heart secrets at the last than those impulsive outbreaks of Nature which will not down. But they had drifted very near on life's sea. There were the wildest dreams of a brilliant future thronging Vreeland's brain as he left the Millionaires' Club to find Dr. Hugo Alberg in his midnight haunt where the Kegelbahn—beer of the stoutest Munich brew, and the songs of the Vaterland invited the Teuton to these cheap luxuries, recalling his happy student days. Vreeland soon caught his gloomy bird.

Vreeland quickly led the startled Doctor aside. He handed over to him five one-hundred-dollar bills. "Get out of here by the first morning train. Make any

professional excuse. Find out who is up at Lakemere with your patient, and, from Justine you must get me the whereabouts of that dark-haired girl who worked for me. The pretty one that you saw in my room—Miss Romaine Garland.”

“I will be waiting for you at your rooms on your return—and, bid Justine not to dare to write or send a message save by you. There is the devil to pay somewhere!”

Neither Senator Garston nor Harold Vreeland were to be found on the busy Saturday which dawned upon them. For Vreeland, telegraphing down to the office that he was called out of town for the half-holiday, closeted himself with a downtown detective firm.

Long before the hour for Alberg’s return, Vreeland knew that Hugh Conyers was absent at New Orleans, on a mission for the “Clarion,” and that his art-loving sister had accompanied him, en route to Colorado Springs, for the rest of the raw spring season. Their dainty little apartment was closed and locked.

There were thus two dangerous enemies out of the way.

At five o’clock the travel-wearied Dr. Alberg returned with his budget of news.

“There has been a devil of a scene up at Lakemere,” growled the Teuton. “I found my handsome vixen of a patient in a decidedly healthy rage. This Senator Garston came up on a train an hour later than mine.

“There was a violent quarrel between him and our patroness. Justine could only linger near enough to hear loud voices, and soon, Garston dashed away as madly as if the Wild Huntsman was after him. Now, our one friend bids me tell you that Sara Conyers has really gone West on business for Mrs. Willoughby.



"The pretty fraulein has vanished, too—but she is in some plot. The night before the Conyers woman left, the three sat up nearly the whole night. Justine would have followed this girl, but she can not manage to be even a moment out of the mistress' sight. And old Endicott comes and goes every day. Justine hates the very shadow of the Garland woman, for Madame has taken one of her sudden fits of fancying a new face—you know how that lasts," growled Alberg.

Harold Vreeland sought out Senator Garston, whom he found at dinner, with the sparkling California beauty at his side. A few whispers were exchanged, and then, an appointment was soon made. Garston gave no sign to the young man that he had listened that day to a defiance unto death. "He is a liar, too," mused Vreeland, and yet, for all this, he forgot, too, to even mention that he had been out of town.

And yet, gazing into Katharine Norreys' inviting eyes, as he bade her adieu, Vreeland found that part of his "purchase price" to be wonderfully fair.

"I could go easily through life with her, backed by a senatorial 'push,' and plenty of money.

"But I will have it all secured. The money all paid down first. Garston then becomes my real employer. In this ominous drift, I must change ships at sea—always a risky business, but yet the bold-hearted Perry won laurels and immortality thereby. And yet, this man may be tricking me." Vreeland, after cogitation, realized that Garston had not actually lied, but he had prudently held back the truth. "I suppose that he is holding the old secret of her early life over her.

"Who the dickens was the missing man? This girl must have had a father. And that father hailed Elaine Willoughby as 'Margaret' in her heyday."

"I suppose this cold, granite-hearted upstart has blackmailed his way into the secret pool of the 'sweetness and light.'

"Sugar and Oil is a most profitable amorphous mixture.

"And he would now like to block Alynton's little game—and so to be free to hold the past over this wonder-working woman's head."

"Senator Garston," cried Vreeland, "you may yet find that love will not be led in chains. Of all hells on earth, the embrace of an unwilling woman is the coldest revenge of an outraged Nature. And he should beware of Elaine—if she can, she will strike back at him like a wounded lioness.

"And for my own safety there is but one rule, 'Cash down on the delivery of goods.'

"And so far, he only proposes partial payments—with Katharine Norreys as our mutual gage of faith to the last."

Agnostic as he was, Vreeland was forced to admit that Garston's disclosure of Mrs. Willoughby's marital chains had swept away his last hope of ever being the master of Lakemere.

She was still the wife of some unknown John Doe—and Vreeland knew that Garston would never babble.

The young broker was ready now to play his last card to make his position between the two enemies impregnable. He was again at Life's crossroads. But he had a last little game to play out before a final decision.

He was the picture of elegant prosperity as he picked his way up the long stairs of the modest apartment on a side street where the humble Kelly family gazed from a four-story window upon a row of private stables opposite.

The hour was opportune, and his own coupé awaited him below. The hands of the little clock marked nine as Vreeland raised his hat to the white-haired old Irish mother seated there, prayer-book in hand, and giving a touch of dignity to the plain little "parlor."

The keen-eyed young schemer quickly noted the photograph of Miss Romaine Garland proudly given the place of honor upon the mantel.

Before he could announce his errand, Miss Mary Kelly painfully limped in from the other room, whence a murmur of voices had told him of her presence. If he could only trap her into revealing Romaine's address!

All his gentle gravity of manner was manifest as Vreeland explained his personal call. "I desire to send to Miss Garland her uncollected monthly salary, and also to obtain some private papers which must be yet in her possession," began Vreeland, carefully studying the girl's plaintive pale face.

"If you would kindly give me Miss Garland's present address, I can send a messenger to her. She probably forgot the papers."

Vreeland paused, and then his heart hardened, as the young girl's fearless eyes looked him through and through.

There was an indictment in her innocent glances which made him mutter, "Miss Majesty has surely blabbed about the Ollie Manson musicale. That was a clumsy failure."

"I can not give you Miss Garland's address, Mr. Vreeland," said the girl, with an uneasy glance at her old mother.

"She has left New York City for good, and I think has gone to California,"

"When she said 'good-by' to me, she mentioned that she would not care to continue as the only woman worker in your employ. I presume that you will hear from her through Miss Marble's agency."

Vreeland's quick wit told him that here was "no thoroughfare." And all his mean suspicions had been strengthened by Joanna Marble's world-worn innuendoes. His lips curled in an unmanly sneer. "Ah, yes! I think I shall write to Miss Marble, and now inform her of the young woman's dishonorable discharge. I can, of course, send her salary to the agency, and as for my papers, I presume that they went to California with her 'character.' Respectable young women are usually not ashamed to own their residence. Did she tell you this up at Lakemere?"

His voice was cutting and insulting in its brutal sneer.

The frightened semi-cripple was struggling to her feet to leave the room, when a brawny, blue-coated young giant dashed through the still opened door.

He seized Vreeland's wrist with an iron clutch and twisted him around before the startled young girl, while the old mother's hands went up in a pious appeal. There was the hatred of hell on Vreeland's face as he struggled in that vise-like grip.

"Forbear, Dan Daly! Remember that he's under our roof," the aged widow cried.

The young roundsman fixed a truculent glance upon the astonished Vreeland. "Apologize, both to the present and absent, you great hulking coward," he cried. "If it were not for my blue coat, I'd throw you down stairs. And now get out the way you came. Be quick, too, about it!"

With a mumbled apology, crestfallen and raging at heart, Vreeland sneaked down stairs,

"I was a fool to get into this low Irish nest," he growled, as he sprang into his coupé.

When safely back at the "Elmleaf" he reviewed the whole situation. "There's a cold plant here! That woman has never left this town. I think that I'll work the wires to Colorado Springs, and the detectives can handle California for me."

He went out to a gay little late supper, not realizing that Dan Daly the Roundsman had just sworn a mighty oath to "keep his eye" on the elegant member of the "Swell Mob," and all Daly's oaths were sworn to for love's sweet sake, and were doubly iron clad.

It was with a shiver of impending fear that Vreeland, pausing at a cigar store on Herald Square, accidentally overheard the night chatter of two late newspaper Bohemians: "I always thought Hugh Conyers was not a marrying man, but it seems that he is a quiet, sneaking lover after all."

"Down at Philadelphia the other day I saw him put his sister, Sara, on board a State line boat for Europe, and the prettiest young woman I ever saw, a staving-looking brunette, was with the old maid artist. Hugh was mighty affectionate, too, I can tell you."

"Liars and deceivers all," raged Vreeland. "But I've got their whole game now. They have run her over to Europe. I can find her there easily."

He went home, triumphant in his future plans, little dreaming that Mrs. Elaine Willoughby had called Justine to her bedside at Lakemere a half an hour before. "I have been robbed, and robbed here, in my own house," the lady sternly said. "You alone know of the paper hidden in my corset. Explain at once."



## CHAPTER XII.

## MINE AND COUNTERMINE.

The mistress of Lakemere was frozen into a forced calm as she keenly eyed Justine Duprez standing with open-eyed astonishment before the woman whose heart was still racked with the sharp battle with Garston. But Justine's heart was tranquil. The nurse was far away over the seas now.

The one man living who knew the vital secret of her life had thrown off his mask in the bitter conflict of the afternoon.

"If you will not bring me into your life again, Margaret," he cried, "I swear that I will fight my way to that child's side, and she shall know how your cold pride is throttling a father's honest love. It has been a hard life, the lonely one I've led.

"And to that child's side, I will yet win my way.

"Remember, Alynton and his friends must listen to me. I can crush you.

"The walls of your flimsy social fortification will fall around you at my touch. Tell me, where have you hidden our child—your child, Margaret Cranstoun! My child!" And a new fear had entered into the mother's soul, all bereft of a husband's love.

The Senator's appeal was the hoarse, pleading cry of a last despair, and in it were the echoes of the last agony of a desperate man. There before him, still defiant, stood the wife of his youth, glowing in her autumn beauty, and at the last, madly desired by the revenge of an outraged love.

All the triumphs of his life were only Dead Sea fruit, apples of Sodom. For he knew that the proud, silent lips before him might tell the story of a father's shame to that unknown girl whose lovely face now haunted him. The girl whose picture still rested on the heart of the yet unbought Vreeland. For the schemer had carefully reclaimed his property.

"The past is sealed. You shall never hear her call you father. Mine she is forever, brought forth in tears, nurtured in sorrow and mine alone," defiantly cried Elaine. "I have bought my freedom, with all these long and lonely years, and it is Nature's revolt against the recreated passion of your youth.

"Tell me," she sternly said, "had you found me poor, faded, broken, in obscurity, would you have then begged to atone?" She faced him like a tigress.

His quivering lips refused to lie, but he drew nearer to her menacingly. "Stand off!" she panted. "Your ownership is forfeit. The brute tyranny of marriage as made by man; you can not reforge the chain I wore once. Every fiber of my flesh revolts against your touch. And she—the pure, the innocent, you shall never see. I swear it!" He had thus raged at her side in brutal menaces.

"I go now to Alynton. They shall know whom they trust with secrets that would shake a nation," the passion-blinded man growled, forgetting that he had dropped to the mere bully. But the victorious woman laughed him to scorn.

"I hold them, you and your masters, in the hollow of my hand," the defiant woman said. "At bay, a true woman fears nothing. Your ruin and public shame await you. I will deal with them alone." And so he had failed.

When James Garston was gone, his mad thoughts goading him on to the final purchase of Vreeland as the seal of his revenge, the exhausted woman had sought her room. "I must telegraph for Judge Endicott," she muttered. "This paper must be placed where neither murder nor millions can reach it." She slowly examined the dangerous envelope, and then her stricken heart stopped beating as the blank paper fluttered down at her feet. Gone—when—where—how? A thousand times she had felt it there resting on a heart now thrilled with a loving hunger for the beautiful girl who was far away over the yeasty Atlantic surges, with the one woman whom she could trust in life and death, Sara Conyers.

She had hardly felt the clasp of her daughter's loving arms before fate sundered them. Fate and fear had parted them.

Her mind was working with lightning rapidity as she awaited the stubborn French maid's answer. In an instant she revolved the whole circle of her friends and foes. Who was the thief? Justine's calm voice recalled her to the troubles of the moment. "I have never seen it since I sewed it in for you at the Arlington Hotel. Madame does not doubt me, I hope. Have any of the jewels in my custody been stolen or your money? When did Madame discover the loss?"

Under the clairvoyance of suspicion, Elaine realized the unmistakable air of the *declassée*, in the woman's crafty face and the physical abandon of her tell-tale bearing. And yet, she felt that Justine was technically innocent.

Secure in a nearness to her generous employer, Justine Duprez had lately given herself over to all the easy luxuries of a vicious life, and the unerring record

was now written on her smug face. There was all the insolence of the woman's vile nature shining in her velvety eyes—the servant ready to turn and rend her mistress.

"Here is a possible enemy, a spy, the willing tool of others," mused Elaine Willoughby, as she rose and coldly said, "The matter is merely an annoyance, not a loss. I however wish to be always able to trust those around me." In her own mind she quickly recalled the last time when she had verified the existence of the document which bound up a financial secret of national importance. It was on the day before the dinner at which James Garston had come back into her life as a living legacy of a dead past. The existence of the paper had been verified then, in view of possible "business." "When had it been stolen?" Her long illness flashed upon her. There were a hundred chances since then.

"Madame may remember her long illness," sullenly said the uneasy Frenchwoman, at last. "There were two strange women in charge of you, night and day. I was not responsible for them, the Doctor brought them here. One of those nurses robbed Dr. Alberg himself later, and then ran away. *Mon Dieu!*

"The story was in all the papers. And, *pardonnez moi*, Madame was out of her mind. The story of that woman's theft was a talk of the town. Doctor Alberg supplied her place from the St. Vincent's Hospital service. Did he not tell you? But I am sure that he never knew that Madame, too, had been robbed. And these women were in sole charge for a fortnight of all your effects. They were in the sick-room night and day. As for me, Madame, my character is my sole capital."

She laid a bunch of keys upon the night stand. "If

Madame will please have some one verify her jewels, laces and wardrobe, I am ready to depart. I shall see the French Consul. He will protect me. And I will remain here, if Madame pleases, until my room and boxes are searched. To-morrow I go. *A votre disposition!*"

The sly soubrette feared however that she had gone too far, as her mistress sternly gazed at her with eyes flashing with indignation. "Take up your keys, Justine, and go back at once to your room," she quietly said. "Send the housekeeper to me."

In ten minutes, Justine Duprez listened to the quick galloping of a horse, whirling a coupé away at a break-neck speed. There was help sent for. Was it to be the police? She raged in her heart, for there was no indication of her angry mistress' intentions.

"Not a word can I send off to warn Vreeland. It is every one for himself now. And she dare not arrest me, for all her quiet suspicions. The other women were in charge. And Vreeland must protect me now." Justine felt reasonably safe.

The woman dreamed uneasy dreams, however, that night, for she had realized in the past days, to her astonishment, that she had been skillfully kept chained to her mistress' side. She knew nothing of the one darling hope of Elaine Willoughby's heart, to hide Miss Romaine Garland forever from the gleam of the pitiless eyes of the passion-maddened husband of her youth. And the caution of the secret council of friends had held her as a hostage indoors.

But Dr. Hugo Alberg was absolutely in the dark when he reached Lakemere by the earliest morning train. He marveled at the absence of Justine, when he awaited the summons of his supposed patient. The



woman, secretly frightened more every moment at her long isolation from her only protector, was on duty, charged with carefully examining every article of her mistress' wardrobe, and searching all the rooms where the invalid had been despoiled by parties unknown. She became bolder, for as yet, they had not dared to arrest her.

Through the opened doors of the anteroom, Justine Duprez could see the flushed face of the greedy German doctor as he conversed in a low tone with the woman whose every faculty was now on the alert. It was an hour of drawn out agony to her before the doctor hastened away, and from her window, Justine could see him being rapidly driven back to the station. And still her mistress was sternly silent.

That evening the household at Lakemere was reinforced by a detective in plain clothes, who publicly assembled every inmate of the mansion house and questioned them all, for some hours, upon every movement of the two nurses who had been in charge of their mistress. A shadow of suspicion brooded over the whole *ménage* now. Justine Duprez was now conscious of a burning gnawing at her heart.

For, all day the pale-faced cripple, Mary Kelly, had been working with flying fingers at the side of Mrs. Willoughby, and the rattle of the key and the clang of the telephone bell was unceasing. The Frenchwoman's nerves were shaken with the suspense.

"Vreeland is powerless here," mused the frightened Frenchwoman. "He forgot in his haste to tap the wires from Lakemere to the old Judge's office, and so, all harm can be done to us now. We are only digging in the dark. We have no defense what-

ever. We are cut off from each other. This house is really a prison for me now."

The easy swing of Justine's debonnair insolence would have moderated had she known that a detective promptly met Doctor Hugo Alberg at the Forty-second Street Station; that Mary Kelly's schoolboy brother had orders not to lose sight of Vreeland in his daily wanderings, until relieved by the night detective; that the "Circassia," too, was being watched night and day, and that even Senator James Garston was now provided with an invisible escort. For, Elaine Willoughby was fighting for life and love now, to the death.

While Justine was held an unwilling listener to the detective's cross-examinations at Lakemere, Judge Hiram Endicott was closeted below in a grave conference with Mrs. Willoughby, whereat Roundsman Dan Daly, looking sheepish enough in mufti, watched the pale-faced Mary Kelly's slender fingers recording in shorthand all the directions of the silver-haired lawyer.

It was midnight before the entire domestic force at Lakemere were allowed to separate, after volunteering an examination of all their rooms and luggage. They knew not what had been stolen, but a vague distrust of each other was now written on all their sullen faces.

"This forces me to volunteer to do the same, and so, cuts off my lawsuit for damages," snarled Justine, as she descended to find the rooms of her wearied mistress in darkness.

The hastily summoned counselors had departed to New York, without the Frenchwoman even learning of their identity. And now, in her loneliness, Justine Duprez became the prey to a sudden fear.

In the silence of the night she conjured up visions of a condign punishment reaching only herself. Her

fellow-conspirator, her ignoble lover! If he could only be warned.

It was one o'clock when she stole out into the silent gardens dreaming around the mansion. It was a desperate plan, but it would warn her lover and accomplice. If she could only reach the village!

But it was two miles to the railroad station. Once there however, a French restaurateur, who was her slave, could send a dispatch to the old hag in charge of her rooms on South Fifth Avenue. She could even send a messenger boy down to warn Vree-land. And the letter which explained the dangers now threatening them all was hidden in her bosom, ready for the mail, and inclosed under cover to the old woman. The little haunt at the station was open all night for the trainsmen and freight handlers—a sort of all-night caravansera.

And she knew she could trust Pierre Gervais. A throb of guilty pride stirred her bosom. He was her easily subjugated slave, and her countryman.

Young, alert and active, the two miles of country road was nothing to the hardy Parisienne, child of the *trottoirs*. Her hand was already upon the latch of the nearest gate, as a dark form glided to her side. She was trapped!

"Rather late for a walk, Mademoiselle," quietly remarked the detective, who had stolen after her noiselessly. "You must beware of the night air. It is treacherous." In a sullen silence, Justine Duprez returned to the house. "Here is where you went out; I guess that you know the way back," the detective meaningly said, as he resumed his steady tramp around the house. And the baffled woman slunk upstairs in a silent wrath.

Safe in her room, Justine Duprez hastened to burn the letter which now weighed upon her breast with a crushing weight. "My God! If it had been daylight and they had searched me! Then, the prison cell would have received me." With chattering teeth she crept to a corner, and, unlocking her trunk, took a deep draught from the brandy bottle. She eyed herself in the glass. Her face was the very image of guilt. Its mien was that of a hunted woman. "There will soon be trouble for others now," she defiantly said. "The only story that will save me from prison for this attempt is the lame one of a lover in the village. *Va banc!* I have lost my place anyway; my character can follow it. This cool woman below is not deceived. They have cut all our wires. I am to be dogged to death here, day by day. But they can prove absolutely nothing as to the cursed paper. And my character is just as good as before."

She laughed a defiant laugh and hummed a bar of a song from *La Perichole*. "*O mon cher amant, je te jure, que je t'aime de tout mon coeur.* He has to shield me—to support me now," she cheerfully concluded, as the strong cognac cheered her, "for he is in my power, and Alberg, too; and that sly boots, August Helms also. They dare not abandon poor Justine. At the last I confess, and save myself, for my money is all safe in Paris. Perhaps the Madame would pay me well; who knows?"

With profound astonishment, Justine Duprez saw the next day glide by without reproach of any kind. Her mistress had resumed her normal calm, and beyond a formal search of the whole house, the matter of the robbery was left in *statu quo*.

Even when Mrs. Willoughby, at night, directed her

to pack all her immediate belongings for an instant return to New York City, there was no mention of that intercepted nocturnal visit to the station so skillfully planned. It looked as if the storm was blowing over. The household had regained its normal calm.

The telegraph and telephone wires were voiceless and but one ominous cloud lingered over the woman whose personal belongings had passed a most triumphant inspection. She was not able to evade the sight of the keen-eyed cripple or of her mistress, for even ten minutes.

And the cat-like nature of the woman rightly warned her of a coming storm. It was impossible for her the next day, on their departure, to reach her faithful dupe, Pierre Gervais, for even a moment at the station.

"Remember, Justine, to watch over my jewels," said her mistress, calmly. "Miss Kelly and yourself must not separate for a moment. I hold you both responsible for them." And Justine knew the faith of Mary Kelly but too well.

"I wonder if I am to be arrested on our arrival in New York," gloomily mused the woman, who now felt herself entrapped. But her spirits rose as she realized that once in the "Circassia" there would probably be a visit from Harold Vreeland himself, at once. "If I can only see him, warn him, then we are safe, for he will shield me," she exulted.

And Dr. Alberg, with August Helms, too, would be under her control. Then it would be an easy matter to thoroughly forewarn the man to whom alone she looked now for safety.

With true Gallic prevision, her secretly stolen hoard of the seven long years past, as well as Vreeland's



bribes, was now all safely deposited in her own name in Paris, and she could gaily laugh at the wolf at the door. For there were also the two nurses between her and a conviction.

"Yes," she exulted, "I can snap my fingers at them, and say '*Bon jour, M'sieur Loup! Comment ça va.*' "

The only thing now was to comfortably reach Paris. For she knew that even across the sea she could draw upon Harold Vreeland's golden hoard. "He may even come over there, to me, at Paris, and I can finish plucking him there." With a demure sleekness, she plumed herself and closely watched the inscrutable face of her beautiful mistress. Justine well knew the awkwardness of a mistress daring to arrest her confidential maid. There was, however, a perfect serenity lingering upon the noble lines of the human mask which now baffled even the velvety-eyed Justine, even though her wits were sharpened by her fears.

In the period since the discovery of the abstraction of the vastly important document, Elaine Willoughby had been fortified with Judge Endicott's calm counsels. She knew, too, that she was surrounded with friends, lynx-eyed and active, and that her emissaries were in the enemy's camp.

It had only taken Endicott ten minutes to give her a list of her probable friends and foes. "The whole thing proves that you were known to be lulled into the idea that your precious deposit was still there. No one would dare to threaten or blackmail you and produce that paper; it is too risky. It would land all the gang into Sing Sing at once." He recounted all those whom its possession could possibly benefit. "There is Garston, a rugged egoist, and a cool-headed, middle-aged possible wooer. A man who would confidently

pit his money and place against Alynton, even though younger and a thousand times his superior in any woman's eyes."

Elaine Willoughby listened in a hushed relief, for, as fond woman often does, she had only told her aged Mentor half the truth. She had merely hinted at Garston's growing infatuation. "There is Vreeland, whom I thoroughly detest, and think him at heart capable of any sneaking villainy. Moreover, Noel also thinks so. Your generous fancies have cost you dearly in the past, in your easily volunteered faith. Separately or together this dangerous document would benefit Garston and Vreeland.

"Now, mark me. Garston would use it, of course, only to bring you to his arms. You would hear of it from him only, for that purpose only."

"And Vreeland?" tremblingly demanded his client.

"Would blackmail you for a fortune if you ever fell in his power. I hate his sleek ways, his insincere eyes, his cat-like moves.

"Minor enemies are Alberg and your French maid. This German doctor shall not have sole charge of your health again. His explanation about the nurse is a very lame one. Of course, you can not pin him down, for he refuges himself behind an ignorance of your loss, and points to her flight and the hubbub in the papers and the police records.

"Of course, you were too ill to be bothered, and so you may have been despoiled by either the maid or one or both of the nurses.

"Justine alone knew where the document was; she has been only the agent of some one of the three; perhaps of all. A rich widow's doctor too may be her nearest foe. Why in God's name did you not have a repu-

table family physician? In your easy seclusion you thought yourself safe.

"Now go away, and leave them all to me. All depends upon your absolute unconcern, and leaving them to me. The rats will come together as soon as you are out of the way."

When Hiram Endicott said adieu, it was with a last injunction to Elaine not to use either the telegraph or telephone in her absence. "The fact is, my dear child, if you had married some good man instead of dallying along with these discoveries, you would now be proof against all such attacks."

The grumbling old Judge thought of a golden-hearted, manly lover whose secret he had unwittingly surprised, and sighed when he was on his homeward way. "Given to a woman for her choice, a sly knave, a handsome fool, and a man really worthy of her, she will try either of the first two before ever thinking of the noble heart under her feet. The experience of every other woman seems to be merely thrown away. It is the song of the Pied Piper of Hamelin over again."

The old lawyer swore a deep oath in his rage. "If I can not protect her against the weaknesses of her own heart, I will at least punish some of these banded rascals. For they will soon fall into my trap."

To the astonishment of the mystified Justine Duprez, there was a new butler on duty in the "Circassia," a man whose cold and piercing eyes made her tremble. And also a deft-handed, middle-aged American woman, whose husband, an extra servant, was evidently cast for "responsible duties." And she could not divine the meaning of all this, but she was tied down to her lonely rack.

The long day dragged away—a day of imprisonment and one of isolation. There was no visit of the ardent-eyed Vreeland, that envy of all rising men! And Doctor Hugo Alberg, too, was conspicuously absent.

The Parisienne felt the toils closing around her, as her mistress called her to her side before dinner. But the “Madame” was perfectly unmoved.

“I am leaving here for some weeks, Justine,” she carelessly said. “All your duties in my absence will be to continue to search this entire apartment with Miss Kelly for the paper, which I may have mislaid. Miss Kelly, who will remain here, will have entire charge in my name, and I expect you to remain here with her. You will thus have ample time to make a most careful search, and very likely you will find the paper, only a mere formal legal document.”

The Frenchwoman gasped: “Of course, I am free to go out as I wish?”

“Certainly, Justine,” was her mistress’ reply. “But always with Miss Kelly, as she may need you to help her at any moment. I leave her as my representative.”

The ashen pallor of fear tinged Justine Duprez’s cheeks, as she bowed in silence. “They know all, and I—I—must hold Vreeland now, between myself and the prison door.” Her mistress’ easy politeness gave no ground for mutiny or quarrel.

The frightened maid knew not whither her mistress had departed when the “Circassia” was deserted that evening by both the new body servants and the Lady of Lakemere. Their use as a bodyguard was all too evident.

But the resolute, pale-faced stenographer was on duty there and ready to enter upon her new

kingdom. There was but one forlorn hope left to Justine—a hurried visit to August Helms, and to send the janitor down to the Elmleaf with a message to Harold Vreeland. She had not left the building, and her little absence was unnoted.

“Tell him that I must see him at once on a matter of life and death, and that he must come to your rooms and wait there to meet me. It is the only way, and he must come without a moment’s delay, for all our sakes! Go!”

The stolid German janitor smiled over the ten-dollar bill, which he pocketed, and after an hour’s waiting at the Elmleaf, learned from the parchment-faced Bagley that Mr. Harold Vreeland was dining at the Savoy with Senator Garston and Miss Norreys. A grand, private “swell function,” and so, likely to be a late one.

“I’ll give him your message,” obligingly said Mr. Vreeland’s man. “I ’ave always to wait up for him, you know. He has to be undressed by me. So, I am sure to see him.”

Helms was anxious to get away and sample the good “Münchner Leist-brau” in his brother-in-law’s saloon near by, and so he yielded up his story with a sly wink. “Fine girl, that Justine. They are all the same—these pretty French maids.”

When he lumbered away, he did not realize that Judge Hiram Endicott had received the message before the triumphant Harold Vreeland had returned, flushed with both love and wine. The blundering janitor had played into the enemy’s hands, and Bagley had easily earned a heavy reward.

Before Vreeland sat in hiding the next morning, awaiting Justine in Helms’ rooms at the “Circassia,” Hugh Conyers handed a cipher dispatch to Mrs. Elaine



Willoughby at Washington, on her way to Asheville, in the far North Carolinan hills. "There is the missing link, Madame," said Conyers. "Vreeland and your maid have jointly robbed you. This vulgar janitor is only their tool and paid go-between. Doctor Alberg and Vreeland were shut up together for some hours yesterday, and you will find that the janitor has probably robbed your private letters in their interest. I'll wire now to Officer Dan Daly, and have him watched day and night. He is only a beer-sodden fool. But we will just let them go on, and drop one by one, into the trap. You will later find Garston lurking behind it all. I think I begin to see his little game. Somehow, I distrust that man," and he murmured, semi-unconsciously, as he gazed at the agitated woman beside him:

"Your lonely life has made you an easy prey heretofore to both schemer and fortune-hunter. You will have now Romaine to guard, and you need help. You can not go on and brave society's natural curiosity.

"And, no half explanations will do. When we have recovered your missing document, you must abandon forever all your operations in the Street, and go away to some safe European land, either Sweden, Switzerland or Germany, and, moreover, under a good guard.

"If you stay here, you need a resolute man at your side, one who knows all your enemies, and one who can protect you. It is the revenge of Nature's laws. You can not be father and mother both to your beautiful Cinderella—God bless her!"

"And do you think that my friends are in any danger over the loss of the stolen document?" tremblingly said Elaine, fixing her eyes fondly upon his earnest face.

"No," said the journalist. "There has been time already to have struck at them. The paper is only held to coerce you—either to gain over your hand in marriage, or else, money will be the price of your safety.

"If it's Vreeland, it will be merely money. If it's Garston, and far the more dangerous of the two—a man not foolish enough for criminal blackmailing threats—then he wants to control both you and Romaine.

"Of course, he has no claim whatever on Romaine. He would only use her as the pivot to turn your heart toward him."

Elaine Willoughby's eyes were filled with sudden tears. "If I only dared to tell you all!" she murmured.

But as their hands met, Hugh Conyers brokenly said: "I am yours to the death; I can wait for your words, Elaine. Romaine is safe under a watchful guardian. Roper was an old Wells-Fargo shotgun messenger; a trusted Pinkerton man later, and as Romaine is Sara's roommate, and as Roper never leaves them by day, you and I can wait here without fear till the demand is made on you.

"And then, you may find the two men whom I fear turn up together. But the very moment they take any steps that indicate the possession of the document, the tables are turned.

"They are then in our power. And Bagley may further trap Vreeland."

"He may have sold his secret to Senator Garston," faltered Elaine Willoughby. "The only man on earth whom I fear."

"Fear nothing, however, while I am at your side,

and Endicott is our Blucher in reserve. Our fears are always more real than our hopes," said Conyers, as he relapsed into a brown study. He feared a self-betrayal.

The winsome woman at his side was gazing at him with a new and tender light in her eyes. "How noble he is! How true!" she sighed; for Hugh Conyers' friendship was a rock in the desert of her life.

It was after four that afternoon when Harold Vreeland, plainly dressed, sauntered into the rear entrance of the "Circassia," and sought the rooms of August Helms, the janitor. He was only waiting for the final sale of a soul and to hear the full story of Justine. The cold relegation to his routine duties at the office, and Mrs. Willoughby's message, had now cut off all hopes of a nearer social approach.

"I must be very careful," he mused. "These fellows down here are all on the watch; and if Elaine abandons me, I am half stranded with my winter's extravagance and, my poor fifteen thousand dollars will not go very far. But, Garston counsels me to keep cool, to play my old game, and to post him. He must now give me his open aid, and Elaine may not then dare to thrust me out.

"And if I married Katharine Norreys, that would be the fairest reason for a transference into Senator Garston's camp.

"He must give me his entire business in stocks."

He had quietly dropped into his old business routine, and the waxen mask of his face was unruffled even before Wyman and Noel Endicott, his foes in ambush. He had in some dim way realized that Elaine Willoughby had only used him as a lever to crush the dead favorite, Hathorn. And he began now to fear her variable nature.

"I do not dare to accuse her," he growled, "for Alida's visits were a treason to my trust. Does she know of them?" He breathed freer at the rumors of the approaching marriage of the golden-hearted Potter with the woman who was his natural mate. "That will keep her mouth shut forever, for her own sake!" meanly exulted Vreeland.

When Justine glided into the dark back room of the janitor, her excited lover cut short all tenderness.

"Tell me, for God's sake, all you know! We can make an appointment for South Fifth Avenue afterwards."

He had brought a roll of crisp bills to stimulate Justine's memory, and when he slipped away half an hour later, his heart was throbbing wildly. He was armed at all points now.

In his mean egoism, he saw the storm lowering only over Justine's head. "Bah! they will merely chase her over to Paris; a few thousand will close her mouth there.

"And I can surely afford it, when I marry Katharine Norreys, a millionairess *in posse!*"

He went directly to the Savoy Hotel, after sending up a beautiful corbeille of flowers. His mind was made up at last. "Justine is all right. She dare not talk. And they will seal her lips and send her out of America." He laughed lightly. "My capricious employer! You are only playing my game for me. For I should not care to have Justine Duprez as a bridesmaid. It will be well to have her out of the way. Garston might use his sly arts on her."

Lulled by his mean selfishness he forgot all his own risks, in believing the now half-desperate maid to be the single object of suspicion.

He little knew that the police were quietly watching every movement of himself, Doctor Alberg and the now fretful Justine. The cool body servant, Bagley, was a spy by night and day; and even janitor August Helms and the two letter-carriers at the "Circassia" were under the surveillance of roundsman Dan Daly's friends in plain clothes.

A minute mark on every letter and a special time list enabled Miss Mary Kelly, self-possessed and untiring, to compare daily her list with the chief clerk of Station Z.

An average detention of two hours on every letter, and the use of prepared decoys, told of the unfaithfulness of the janitor and the collusion of the unfortunate Mulholland, who had succumbed to the demands of a thirst beyond his salary. For the other letter-carrier had vindicated himself, and aided to trap his fellow.

Harold Vreeland was now ready for his final bargain with the stony-faced Senator James Garston. He had withdrawn himself from general society, and, as envious swains said, was "making the running" now on Miss Katharine VanDyke Norreys.

The tall, blonde beauty's exquisite grace, her superb dress, her Western free-lance wit, and all the brilliant glow of her youthful freshness, accentuated the charms of golden hair and the almost pleading violet eyes à *l'Imperatrice Eugenie*.

Once or twice Vreeland fancied that he had discerned a tenderness beyond their relations in her manner to Senator Garston, but his whole faculties were now devoted to the arrangement of his dual future relations.

"I can easily get my price from Mrs. Willoughby—the price of her peace—and I might find a way to discover and return the dangerous paper.



"A voyage to London, hunting down Martha Wilmot, and then, a return of the paper to her as a conquering hero." In fact, the custody of the paper now became a source of daily worry to him. He dared not give it to any other. He feared to deposit it in any bank of the city or in a safety vault.

"I am king over Justine while I have it," he mused, "and to convey it about me is a fearful risk. If I leave it in hiding, a house may burn, and there is always the unexpected to fear. If I should fall ill—" He began to grow morbidly cowardly.

He was lulled by Elaine Willoughby's silence as to her loss. "Of course," he reflected, "Doctor Alberg, the two nurses and Justine were the only ones who had access to her during the illness following Garston's sudden appearance. I am a 'rank outsider' in all that."

It was clear to him that the Lady of Lakemere had accepted Doctor Alberg's ingeniously contrived explanation as to Martha Wilmot's robbery. But the paper—the paper! What to do with it now?

In fact, Judge Hiram Endicott, after a long examination of the newspapers and police records, had finally dismissed the frightened German physician with the remark: "I suppose that this sly adventureress of a nurse thought her patient had concealed some bank bills or stocks in that womanly hiding place, the corset, and has undoubtedly destroyed the private papers, which were of no value to any one but the owner." The able old lawyer calmed the frightened doctor's all too evident fear of losing his "star" patient.

Those same private papers, the original and the copy, had been already shifted by Harold Vreeland, from time to time, through a dozen different hiding places.

"Damn them!" he growled. "If I burn them, I am safe, but then I lose my hold on Elaine. If I sell them to Senator Garston, I am in his hands as a criminal, and forever in his power. I'll make my bargain with him, and then, cover over my breach with Mrs. Wilmoughby by a well-devised return. If she would only give me a sign of her real purposes!" He was in a quandary, and had no counsel.

He never knew that Hugh Conyers wrote the long and even unusually friendly letter from Asheville, in which his patroness announced her intention of a long voyage "for a complete rest and change of air."

A tour, perhaps, around the world via Japan, but he did know that he was to assist Noel Endicott and his cool partner, Wyman, in the routine business.

"Stocks appear to be standing on a dead level," she wrote, "and so, I will lose nothing in my absence."

The clear intimation that he would receive fifteen thousand dollars a year for his services, and that the "Elmleaf" apartment would be kept up as an extra account, satisfied him.

"It will be unnecessary for you to write to me for orders. I may go on from here," the letter concluded; "and you will receive all my final wishes later, through Judge Endicott, by the hands of Noel. Miss Kelly, in charge at the 'Circassia,' will liquidate all the 'Elmleaf' bills as usual, through Bagley. I shall close up both my rooms at the 'Circassia' and Lakemere. Please acknowledge the receipt of this to my Asheville address."

"By Jove! She is a cool hand!" cried Vreeland. "The Colorado Springs humbug and the southern trip was only devised to outwit Garston. She will

go around the world and meet her child in a safe hiding-place. Now I am ready to sell out to Garston for a substantial consideration. I am safe, and, I can easily hoodwink her."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A WEDDING IN HIGH LIFE.

It was a week later when two alert-minded men faced each other over a table in Senator James Garston's private rooms at the Plaza Hotel. No single thread of the tangle had been successfully followed up by the restless Vreeland, save that Mr. Hugh Conyers, gravely occupied in his usual duties, had returned to the office of the *Daily Clarion*.

And of the whereabouts of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, Vreeland knew absolutely nothing, save that in a stolen interview with Justine Duprez he learned that Miss Mary Kelly, now aided by her brother and mother as inmates, was the caretaker of the superb "Circassia" apartment. And so, Justine had a new mistress, pro tem.

The private secretary had handed to the French maid a note from her absent mistress, bidding her remain on duty at the "Circassia" until her own return. "Miss Kelly represents me; she will pay you and give you her orders, carrying out my directions to her." And Justine dared not break away.

There was joy now in Justine's anxious heart, for the stolen interviews at her old rooms in South Fifth Avenue, perhaps, could be soon renewed, Miss Kelly generously allowing the maid all her usual outings.

And Vreeland had soon calmed the Parisienne's growing fears.

"She must however know no more of my affairs now,"

mused the young broker. "She will be useless to me in the future game, as Fate has dealt the cards."

But he knew he might have some further use for her, to watch the promoted amanuensis and to learn of Mrs. Willoughby's movements.

"Yes, she must continue to intercept the letters. Thank Heaven, I can always depend upon the janitor and Mulholland!" was Vreeland's flattering consolation to his soul.

"It is the only way to trace Mrs. Willoughby's real movements and so be able to post Senator Garston."

He would have been disturbed had he marked roundsman Dan Daly, a cool but shadowy pursuer of Justine Duprez on her every outing, and known also that the untiring schoolboy brother was on his own trail all the while.

The moving into the South Fifth Avenue lodging-house of a very agreeable old French crony gave a neighbor to Justine's resident old hag, who speedily became a familiar visitor. And then through the walls of that adjoining room, a carefully contrived peep-hole enabled roundsman Daly's all-seeing eye to witness the now infrequent interviews of Vreeland and Justine.

"I shall not be happy until I place the jewelry on that scoundrel's wrists," was Daly's pledge to his own heart, for he had not forgotten Vreeland—bully and coward! There was a growing score to settle—a long one!

And so Vreeland and Justine had freely met in the fancied security of their Fools' Paradise.

But blissfully ignorant, over the wine, Vreeland in the crowning interview, eyed the Western rising statesman. He was all on the alert as he said: "Senator Garston, I am now ready to close with you.



"But first, you must plainly tell me all. Why do you wish to find this girl?"

Garston carelessly knocked the ash off his cigar, as he coolly said: "There is a large amount of Western property, a very large one, in which that child has an interest, an interest moreover of which she knows nothing. That is my real business with the girl, whose life story I alone know—save the mother who has adroitly hidden her so long. You see her presence would have embarrassed the social queen!"

"Who was her father?" flatly demanded Vreeland.

The Senator's eyes hardened. "That is nobody's business but mine." It does not enter into our affair. And the property interests demand my present silence."

Vreeland shrugged his shoulders, and smiling, calmly said: "You wish me, then, to play my part openly for you, while I am kept in the dark?"

And Garston steadily replied: "What matters it to you, if you are well paid?" His voice was steady, but there was a wolfish anxiety in his eyes. "My professional secrets could not aid you."

"My price will be a high one, and cash down or secured. Either cash or stocks. Sugar stocks will do," meaningly replied Vreeland.

"Damn it, don't haggle!" cried Garston. "Tell me simply what you want."

Vreeland calmly pushed over a piece of paper on which he had written six figures. "I want that, and then, I will marry Katharine Norreys on your pledge of honor that you give to her an equal amount as dowry. You are then to direct the whole future game. Of course, there must be the usual preliminary society flurry over the engagement. I am now ready

to go over to you, body and soul. What do you say? I serve you to the death, then."

"And I am to own you, out and out. You are to keep near her and to work my will," demanded Garston. His voice was strangely eager, for his struggling heart would have its voice.

"To the death," answered Vreeland, "if you pay me first, and then stand by Katharine and myself. It will be a union of heart, hands and interest."

"I'll do it on one sole condition," replied Garston.

"And that is?" eagerly said Vreeland.

"That you clearly understand that your life would be the forfeit of any treachery. I must reach that girl. I am playing a game to the bitter end. And you do not know what a foe that sleek woman can be."

"All right," said the young man, extending his hand. "The future will show you what I am. We must take the risks together."

"I will give you half in cash, the balance in stocks, and I'll hand the check for the cash over now," said Garston, as he laid his revolver on the table.

"Now, sir, let me see that girl's picture. Tell me where she is, and I'll sign the check."

His eyes were wolfish as Vreeland silently handed him the photograph of the girl who had never known a father's love. The young man began his cool recital:

"The girl sailed from Philadelphia for Europe three weeks ago on the steamer 'Excelsior,' under the assumed name of Alice Montgomery, with Sara Conyers, the artist sister of the *Clarion's* sub-editor, Hugh Conyers. She was hidden away here in New York under the name of Romaine Garland, and old Endicott, Conyers and the sister have smuggled the girl quietly away from Lakemere. The two women

are now at the 'Hotel Royal Victoria' at Lucerne, and Hugh Conyers and Endicott are watching every move that you make."

A ferocious gleam lit up the Senator's eyes. He signed the check and passed it over to Vreeland. "I can handle both of them easily," he growled.

"Tell me the whole story now," he said, leaning back with an air of exquisite delight. "My money will do the rest. I'll get to her easy enough."

"You'll have to work quickly then," answered Vreeland, "for Elaine Willoughby has stolen away on an ostensible trip around the world via Japan, but really to meet the girl and her train. There was a private guard who went with the two women. My detective recognized him, and the bodyguard is a cool and dangerous man, too." The Senator's brow was blackened with a ferocious scowl.

"Damnation, she is clever," cried Garston. "I wanted the daughter in this country, for I can not quickly use foreign laws, and any open violence, of course, would be madness. Tell me the whole story. I must be at work at once. It is a serious matter; I must think it over."

It was midnight when the two men separated, after drinking a bottle of "Pommery" to the "ensuing happiness." Garston's eyes were at last gleaming with a triumphant joy. His quick wit suggested the way out.

"You are to stay quietly on in the enemy's camp. I will let her think herself unpursued. Her desire to hoodwink you is our only salvation; and now I will prepare Katharine for your visit. Shake hands! Here's to your married happiness. You are getting a pearl of a woman—a woman fit to be a queen."

"I have made my fortune," mused Vreeland, as he wandered back to the "Elmleaf." "They are both of them in my power, Garston and Elaine. He shall never know that Elaine only found the girl by chance. I will play them off the one against the other."

But, in the silence of his room that night the wild words of Alida Hathorn came back to him. Her parting curse, "I leave it to the future to punish you!" "I don't see where the game can break against me," he reflected, "I hold four aces!" And so he slept reassured.

He had read in the evening paper the announcement of the forthcoming engagement of the "well-known club man and millionaire, Mr. James Potter, to the charming widow of the late Frederick Hathorn." "Newspaper enterprise!" sneered Vreeland. "Well, marriage seals her lips like many another sister who has wandered a few steps from the path. I am safe now."

So rapid was the march of Senator Garston's executive energy that a week later, under the caption of "Prospective Wedding in High Life," Vreeland read the prophetic intimation of his own union with "the brilliant Western heiress, Miss Katharine VanDyke Norreys."

"It is too late to recoil now," he mused, "for this engagement will be telegraphed by Conyers over to my 'financial backer.'"

The barriers were down, and nightly, under the guise of the usual preparations, Vreeland and Garston conspired against the woman whose heart was burning with all a mother's still unsatisfied love. The Senator-elect was using all the mighty resources of his wit, fortune and hardihood to trap the travelers and to



circumvent the wife who had defied him. And he wrought in a stern silence.

There was a little scene with Justine Duprez which was not down on the bills.

And of that scene, roundsman Daly was at once made aware by the reports of his woman spy, now the intimate friend of Justine's old *garde-chambre*.

A common curiosity and the confidences engendered over the absinthe glass caused the two women to mark the comings and goings of the handsome young broker and the lissome French lady's maid who had prospered so wonderfully.

For Justine's hand was an open and a liberal one. Justine had, after a storm of tears, gone away contented. In her heart she proposed in the future to secretly reign over the new *ménage* of her young tyrant and dupe.

When Vreeland had at last quieted his rebellious dupe, he explained to her at once that in the new household there would always be a commanding position for herself, should Mrs. Willoughby cast her out on her return.

"So you see, Justine, I can always protect you, and then, when you wish to go over and settle in Paris, you will always have me near you as a protector."

Harold Vreeland was now perfectly happy, and a little more than usually self-assertive.

For, on Wall Street all men now envied the man who was cementing a union which would practically control the profitable business resulting from Senator Garston's vast operations in stocks and mines.

Garston was a financial battleship, and a man of mark, even on Manhattan's shores.

"Our policy, Harold," genially remarked Senator



Garston, "is to work right into the enemy's camp, and to take no notice of Mrs. Willoughby's little maneuvers. I shall open a large active account with your firm. That gives us the right to be seen together at all places and times. It will blind them all. And while I watch Alynton, you can always keep an eye for me on that crafty young Wyman. Of course, as soon as you are married, Katharine can note every move of the woman we fear. Let them lull themselves to sleep. We will make a strong team, us three! Katharine shall worm into Mrs. Willoughby's intimacy."

And even in the bustling office of Wyman & Vreeland a deeper respect was soon engendered for Vreeland's brilliant, dashing successes. "A Senator behind him, and with the handsome young heiress as a wife, he will have fully as much weight as Wyman backed by his uncle Alynton and the Endicotts," so mused the observant cashier.

In fact, Senator Garston's handlings of Western and Southern roads, far-away mines, added to the immense business of his bold strokes in the leading securities.

"There is no good excuse for Alynton, Wyman nor Mrs. Willoughby pushing you out of the firm as long as you really handle my business," said the acute Garston. "They would have no sufficient business warrant in so doing, for naturally Alynton and myself are bound by both party and personal ties, which must rise above any petty quarrel. I can easily handle Alynton. He is, of course, the secret business counselor of Mrs. Willoughby, and as she fears me, and with reason, she will never strike at you, as long as our pact holds.

"And then, moreover, your marriage with Kath-

arine Norreys removes every possible social objection to continuing your supposed confidential relations with the Queen of the Street. Any kind of a wife brings you within the 'safety line.' Moreover, Mrs. Willoughby is really fond of Katharine, and those blue eyes of the young lady's are as keen as a diamond's flashes."

"Will Alynton finally marry this strange woman?" was Vreeland's searching query.

The stony-faced Senator-elect sprang to his feet, livid with rage. And Vreeland marveled as the angered man harshly cried:

"Never, by God! Impossible! How could he? There's that girl—the one whom I've sworn to take away from her. The mother can not explain the presence of the child to her admirer.

"She dare not! For the Alyntons are all as proud as Spanish hidalgos, and young Alynton is no fool. He would have to find out that she had lied to him—that her whole past life has been a sham—and no man or woman can ever deceive David Alynton twice. He is merciless. I've been a fellow-director with him for years, and I know him. I hold them both in the hollow of my hand."

The Senator quickly saw that his rage had led him on too far, for the young man's eyes were open in amazement at the passionate outburst.

"There are these property interests," he grumbled, "and I suppose she has hoodwinked the girl as to her rights. It's the old game. I am the only living man who can set it straight, and I will do so, in my own way. I have sworn to do it for my own reasons, and to even up with My Lady."

When James Garston went away to direct his secret

agents, now watching Lucerne by its dreaming lake, and following the steamer "Empress of India," nearing Hong Kong, Vreeland tried to pierce the mystery of Romaine Garland's nurture.

"Can it be," he pondered, "that the property which Elaine enjoys really belongs to that child? That the young girl was artfully brought up in ignorance of her rights? Has she been robbed? The young beauty may have broken away inopportunely, and appeared here to embarrass the youthful-looking beauty whom Alynton seems to adore."

He could see no possible solution of the problem. "Garston seems to be enraged at the mere idea of Alynton's intimate relations. Can it be that a secret love in olden days has tied the proud Senator to this wonderful woman? He is dead set against her drifting into Alynton's arms." It was all a life puzzle.

He was ready for the meanest suspicions, but the observations of Justine dispelled them.

"Only friends; nothing more," had been the verdict of a woman who would have gloried to have held her mistress in the clutches of blackmail.

"And the love of the same woman has now, as usual, made Alynton and Garston secret foes," decided Vreeland.

He recalled the legendary source of Mrs. Willoughby's tangible fortune, some Western windfall of vast richness.

"She knew him before, she fears him now, and has spirited the girl away to keep them apart."

It seemed clear to Vreeland that some partner, or old associate, perhaps a client of Garston's in the wild West, had owned both the property and the lovely woman in her flush of girlish beauty.

"It seems to be an old passion," mused Vreeland.

"And now repulsed by the mother, whom evidently he has pursued, Garston would use the girl as a lever for his revenge. Once a breach effected with Alington, and the girl his ally, then the Queen of the Street would either drift into his arms or have 'to step down and out'—to abdicate the crown she has worn so long." Vreeland lumbered along, building up fanciful solutions of the mystery.

In the now almost incessant "duty service" near his beautiful fiancée, Vreeland a hundred times endeavored to trace back James Garston's early life. But the blue-eyed Nixie who was soon to be his wife only laughed merrily.

"Pray remember, sir, that Senator Garston is my guardian. After my dear father's death, my mother went abroad, and I was educated in the 'Sacre Cœur' Convent at Brussels. Her death left me alone in the world.

" 'Uncle James' had been almost forgotten by me in the thirteen years which we passed in Paris and Brussels, and as I left the West a mere child, all my memories are the vanishing dreams of childhood. All his social past is a sealed book to me."

Vreeland was fain to be content, as the lovely ingenue concluded: "All I know is that he has always managed my affairs, and that his personal history is linked with the development of the whole region west of the Rockies. Why, you should know his history from your own Western wanderings."

"Was he ever married?" timidly hazarded Vreeland. But, the young society queen only laughed back.

"Ask him! And then ponder now the possibility of another marriage. You are now, sir, to take me



driving. The only marriage which concerns you, is a joint affair."

That afternoon, as they drove through the park under the chaperonage of the amiable Mrs. Volney McMorris, Vreeland unsuccessfully endeavored to allay his recent dissatisfaction at the absence of any womanly background for the highly polished "Western diamond," which he was soon to win and wear for life.

The story of the young heiress was smooth enough and faultlessly delivered. Vreeland forebore to "pump" Mrs. McMorris, for he was well aware that she was "all things to all men," and her voluble explanations would carry no real conviction.

"She helped Alida Hathorn on to the very verge of ruin," he gloomily recalled.

"There might have been a marriage between myself and Elaine but for her vicious intermeddling.

"She took that Isle of Wight story in commission and spread it all over New York, while working both sides for coin—a woman Judas!"

While he returned the salutations of Messrs. Merri-man, Wiltshire and Rutherford on the social parade, he was vaguely reflecting on the uselessness of his crime as regarded the stealing of the hidden paper and the tapping of the private wires, as well as the mail frauds.

It now followed him like his own shadow, and the paper was a source of countless nightmares. If it were only safe!

"All that is useless now," he growled. And he suddenly saw that he was left in the power of Doctor Hugo Alberg, of Justine and of August Helms, the janitor.

"There will be no speculation in 'Sugar' for months;



the market is dead, pending the reorganization and New Jersey reincorporation.

"My strange employer is away. She will not be here for months; and she has also taken alarm at the presence of Garston.

"The whole lot of them will probably operate in a blind pool now. There will be nothing for me to gain, and everything to lose in running any further risks."

He saw with concern that Alberg greatly missed his wealthy and generous patient, and a few significant hints had proved to him that the German physician was now "money hungry."

"There is Justine always to be pacified, and that brute, Helms, too; he will surely want money.

"Once married, and a fixture here, I am 'nailed to the cross' for torture by these people—if they should turn against me.

"Fear will control Doctor Alberg at the last," reflected Vreeland. "He has been guilty of half-poisoning his patient.

"Justine I can surely rely on as long as I keep her pacified, but, that brute Helms is steadily increasing in his money demands. Some night, when drunk, he may blow the whole thing abroad." And he had caught a glimpse of Helms and Bagley diving into a saloon together. It frightened him.

It was true that Helms had found his way down several times to the Elmleaf to get money, in a half-fawning and half-threatening bluster.

And on several occasions when Vreeland was absent, the grave-faced valet, Bagley, had joined the janitor, and in some hours spent over the cups of Gambrinus had gained pointers which had given the lively roundsman, Dan Daly, some very valuable hints.

There was in his cup of "bittersweet," however, one great consolation to the successful Harold Vreeland, whom all men now envied.

The impending union with Katharine Norreys would found his fortunes on a solid basis; he would have the absolute protection of the great speculative Senator, and the reports of his detectives told him that Hugh Conyers was simply buried in his journalistic duties. It seemed to be a lull in the war, even the pickets had ceased firing.

There were no conferences with Judge Hiram Endicott, and nothing to indicate any activity among Romaine Garland's friends.

Only one side of the whole affair remained dark to Vreeland. Even Justine Duprez could not tell him how or why Elaine Willoughby had openly taken her unacknowledged daughter to her house for shelter.

It was as yet a mystery as to whether fear, intrigue or accident had brought the lovely girl into the opened arms of her still beautiful mother.

"All I know," said Justine, in a conference arranged for this purpose by her now indifferent fellow-conspirator, "all I could find out was, that this green-eyed cripple, this little sycophant Irelandaise, who now is my tyrant, brought the tall girl late one evening to the 'Circassia.' "

"It was a strange visit," murmured Justine, "for she brought no luggage, and that girl never left my mistress' presence for a moment, till she went away with the two Conyers.

"I am certain that Madame had never seen this girl in the seven years of my employ. There were no pictures, no relics of childhood—nothing. And I was

always on the lookout for the mystery of Madame's life—'

Justine demurely dropped her eyes.

"Bah!" she cried; "a woman with blood as cold as a fish! No life, no love; she cares for nothing but money.

"Among all of them, not a lover! I thought she was fond of the dead Mr. Hathorn once, but he was soon on a level with the others."

Justine's voice was duly scornful.

"And then her tears and frequent fits of sorrow! That was the record the whole of seven years.

"The last thing I saw of her—a stolen glance—she had this girl's picture in her hand, and was weeping over it.

"If she is a child of hers, she is probably a child of shame. She now fears the exposure, and has gone abroad to hide the girl away forever. Trust to Justine's experience! I know these women saints. They always have nibbled at *le fruit defendu*—hypocrites!"

Mr. Harold Vreeland fancied that he saw light at last. "I believe that I can observe Senator Garston's game. He would use this hidden fact to force Elaine Willoughby into his arms. By Jove! she does fear him! Perhaps Justine is right.

"And so, when I am married to Katharine, and Garston is free of all social claims, if he alone knows her secret, it may be buried forever in her marriage with him.

"To bring the proper pressure to bear, he must have the girl first. And he would not be too good to bribe the girl with a fancied inheritance. Once that the child is under his influence, Elaine's proud heart must either bend or break.

"For he will win his way to her side, even across the fires of Alynton's hate or the social ruin of Elaine's good name." Vreeland already knew the iron will of the man who was driving ahead with recklessness in the chase.

And so, armed with the deadly secret of the enormously powerful cabal, the stolen document, Vreeland now knew that if brought to bay, Elaine would perhaps be sacrificed by the secret syndicate, despised by the undeceived Alynton, and then, with the secret of her early life in Garston's possession, be utterly at his mercy. "Yes, she is in the toils," he muttered. "There is no escape for her."

It was at the wish of Senator James Garston, now lavishly liberal in his preparations for his ward's wedding, that the bridal was postponed to the first days of June.

"All is going on well, Harold," said Garston. "We have worked into a thorough accord with all her representatives.

"And you will not find love-making with Katharine Norreys an irksome task. I wish only to wait till I learn that Elaine Willoughby has landed at Brindisi.

"Somewhere on the Continent she will surely meet this girl. I shall have instant reports from my detectives. For so far, we have found out Elaine's route, but, the girl is still hidden.

"I wish you to go away at once on your wedding tour, and then to keep Mrs. Willoughby in sight—within touch. I only want to meet the mother and daughter face to face—only once. I will have my innings then, and finish the whole matter in short order." His face was merciless now.

"Now, you will be no object of suspicion on your



wedding tour; such a happy voyage always explains itself," he sardonically smiled. "The moment that I am cabled for, I shall depart incognito. My work will be quickly done when I find this sly woman and her child together. The whole world is not wide enough to hide that child from me." And Vreeland drifted daily under Garston's strong control; he was floating with the tide, drunken with all his successes.

The days drifted along in all the preoccupation of daily business and the growing bustle of the impending wedding.

Harold Vreeland was most agreeably surprised in the later days of May by a cordial letter from Mrs. Willoughby, posted at Port Said. Her congratulations upon his impending marriage were coupled with her *carte blanche* as to leave of absence from the firm, and the significant direction to leave Bagley in charge at the Elmleaf.

"We shall have business uses for the apartment during the winter, and Miss Kelly will give Bagley all his orders and attend to the accounts. I have directed Judge Endicott to present in my name to your wife a proper reminder of the esteem which I have for her."

The notification three days before the wedding, through Noel Endicott, that Mrs. Willoughby had placed a year's salary at his personal disposal on the books of the firm, as an extra bonus, carried away the last vestige of Vreeland's haunting fears.

Nothing remained of the awkward episode of the inquiry as to the stolen document, and Vreeland had already settled with Doctor Alberg, and Helms with an affected liberality, for his absence.

Now socially entirely in the hands of Messrs. Wilt-



shire, Merriman and Rutherford, his three groomsmen, and having seen the resplendent Mrs. Volney McMorris rally many beautiful Ishmaelites, married and single, around his bride, Vreeland was moved forward to the altar on the golden flood of Senator Garston's splendidly liberal preliminary entertaining.

The Western millionaire was touching up every cloud hanging over Katharine VanDyke Norrey's social haziness with a golden lining.

There remained but two things for the happy groom to do now.

The one was to have a last interview with Justine, who was now reduced to a calm subserviency to the orders of the young "Private Secretary," and the other to effect a safe deposit in some satisfactory place of the stolen document and its tell-tale copy.

He had decided to be liberal with Justine in money matters, and to entrust her in his three months' absence with the watching of Helms, the janitor, and the disgruntled German doctor.

A famous plan suggested itself! Justine should feed out to these men money, in his name, during his absence.

"And that, with the hope of more, will keep them true to me, as rascals go, till I return." He had once decided to dismantle the secret connections with Mrs. Willoughby's telegraph and telephone. It was the subject of a long, introspective reverie.

But reflection had told him of a possible mistake. And perhaps in his absence, Justine might glean from the detained correspondence delivered at the "Circassia," some facts to guide both Senator Garston and himself. Yes, the "underground railroad" should

not be disturbed. Its existence was as yet concealed from all his enemies.

The use in the next winter of the "Elmleaf" rooms for a concealed headquarters of speculation caused him to leave the wires in position. "It might excite these people's suspicions. I must appear to trust them," he decided, "and Garston may even make a million over the private tips I can give him if I am up to their game."

Suddenly it occurred to him that his own marriage might change the situation, and yet, there were Elaine Willoughby's recent orders.

"She means probably to hide her child, and then come back and be Queen of the Street again," he smiled. "The ruling passion. She has the speculative mania still." For it was clear to him now that the presence of mother and daughter together in New York City was an unnecessary risk.

And so, even on the threshold of his marriage Harold Vreeland feared to trust his bride with the secret of the stolen document. They were to live at the Hotel Savoy on their return, "so as to be near Uncle James, at the Plaza."

With a moral cowardice which he could not explain, Vreeland had as yet declined to face the burning question of the stolen document. The copy he had always carried secreted within the waistcoat lining of his traveling suit. "I can easily leave that over in Europe," he murmured. "The original. Where shall I hide it?" He was long in the dark.

But it was by a devilish impulse, aided by accident, that he found a place in Justine Duprez's rooms on South Fifth Avenue to safely hide the dangerous original.

One of the plates of a door framing had sprung partly loose. A sudden idea seized him. Her rooms were the safest place for many reasons.

To gain time for preparation, he sent the old hag away on an errand.

Sealed in a cloth envelope, the paper was soon hidden behind the upper framing plate, and with a hammer, covered with his kid gloves, he drove the half-dozen old, rusted nails tightly home. And he gazed in triumph at the neat device.

"They will of course think that she stole it, should it ever be found," he mused triumphantly, as he lit a Henry Clay and gloated over his cunning.

"If the house should burn I am safe. In every way it would go up in flames. If I should die, then it makes no difference to me what happens. If she is caught—this would be damning evidence only against her.

"And I would never dare to trust myself with either Garston or my wife, and be found out in the custody of that document.

"Accidents will happen; I might fall ill, and now no matter what befalls, it never can be traced to me."

He grinned with joy as he contemplated depositing the copy abroad, under an assumed name.

"It will there be safe from all American legal process, and the original is here where I can use it if needed, and as it is, it can never be traced to me."

He carefully examined the exterior of the row of solid brick tenements. They were good for a life of fifty years.

As he walked away, when he had "finished his letters," and left a last greeting for Justine, he stood upon the heights of an impregnable position.

"It was a stroke of genius, that last idea of mine!" he gaily cried, as his eye rested on an old woman who had just descended the stair. He knew not the burden of her eager soul. She carried his fate!

Once around the corner, that old woman scuttered away to find roundsman Dan Daly, for the peep-hole had covered a keenly-glittering eye, even after Justine had left her sighing lover to his "last bachelor letters." And thus the hiding-place was known to more than one.

But Vreeland hastened away in a triumphant glow of satisfaction.

The splendors of the Grace Church wedding, the gilded festivity of the Waldorf wedding dinner, and all the countless preoccupations of the impending voyage busied Harold Vreeland's excited mind for three days.

There were hundreds of valuable wedding presents to deposit in safety, for society had showered gifts upon the successful interloper with its hard-hearted, hollow flattery of success. It had been a "society event," and his face, with that of the beautiful bride, had ornamented several "up-to-date" journals.

The flower-decked bridal staterooms of the "Campania" had received Vreeland's party, and Messrs. Rutherfordstone, Merriman and Wiltshire were joining the bride and bridesmaids in the parting "loving cup," the table was covered with journals filled with the usual "glowing accounts" and piled up high with congratulatory letters and telegrams, when "Uncle James drew the complacent bridegroom aside.

In a private nook, he turned a scowling face to the happy Vreeland.

A yellow telegraph envelope fluttered from his hand to the desk as he read again these disquieting words:

"She has telegraphed for a cabin on the 'Normandie,' and is coming home alone. Took a special train from Vienna to Havre. All traces of girl lost."

"Vreeland," growled the maddened man, "some one has betrayed us. Wait at the Hotel Cecil, London, for my cipher orders."

"That woman is a devil in artfulness, and it is a fight to the death now."

Ten minutes later, the "Campania" was plowing down the beautiful bay.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## FOR THE CHILD'S SAKE!

The crowding passengers lounging on the decks of the "Campania" and "Normandie" idly watched the fleeting waves torn up by the ocean racers as they swept by each other in mid-ocean four days later, but there were strangely agitated hearts, too, on the passing steamers, when the signal flags were broken out.

For, the secret enemies now swept past each other at the distance of a few furlongs.

"What the devil can the real motive of her quick return be?" angrily mused bridegroom Vreeland, as he called up again Senator Garston's baffled fury on learning that for all his goading on, his detectives had failed to locate the missing Romaine Garland.

He led his beautiful bride back to her room, and then left her to the enjoyment of "Les Denis-Vierges," while he eyed the fast-receding "Normandie."

"Another big deal in 'Sugar,' " he suddenly thought, and he felt himself perhaps hoodwinked by both Senators and the handsome woman who had so artfully led him on to his fate. "It may be that they all are fooling me; I may have been merely jockeyed away. Mrs. Willoughby can work the 'off side' of her deals alone from the 'Elmleaf,' and the regular transactions will go on as usual through our firm, really Alynton & Willoughby. Or, she may have picked up another protégé. God only knows what a woman may do.

"They all have their secrets, by Jove! Senator

Garston or this cool devil, Hugh Conyers, may now turn up as the secret broker in my place.

It suddenly occurred to him that the powerful Western millionaire might really be the favored lover, and Alynton, after all, only the dupe of a growing passion. "I am powerless to go further now," he groaned, as he gazed at the rooms where his lovely and exacting bride was "squeezing the orange of life" to its last drop. He had found out, even now, that there were thorns upon his rosebud.

He was not yet entirely satisfied with the status of husband so recently assumed. Still affecting all the delicacy of the lover, he had, however, quite practically approached the subject of Katharine Norrey's investments "in the hands of Uncle James."

And he soon found out that the exquisite form of his dazzling blonde wife hid a resolute and undaunted spirit, an unruffled temper, and an easy, natural defiance of all marital control. "Where did she get her experience of life?" mused the startled bridegroom.

"You must go over all these tiresome matters, Harold, with Uncle James, on our return," the over-wearied, fashionable bride answered.

"I have never entered into any details with him, and I supposed, of course, that you and he had covered all this ground. I have only asked him for money as I needed it since my return, and he has always sent me his checks. It is for you, both business men, to regulate such matters." And she cast her eyes down again on her entrancing book.

"Then you have no permanent bank account of your own?" moodily demanded Vreeland.

"Why should I have one?" innocently replied Mrs. Katharine Vreeland, "when Uncle James has always

paid the bills and furnished me all that I ask? I have never asked him for any formal accounting." Harold Vreeland was secretly nettled at her easy carelessness.

"And if he were to die, if anything happened, you would then know nothing of your own affairs," said the dissatisfied husband.

"No more than I know now of yours, my dear," calmly answered Katharine, settling herself deeper in her cushions. "Uncle James simply told me that you were a very rich man, and of course, I took his word. I have not asked you to inventory your own possessions."

She was turning an unusually interesting leaf as Vreeland walked out of the cabin in a suppressed rage.

"We are both at sea, it appears," was his disquieting thought, and again the remembrances of that slender family tree of his lovely wife annoyed him. It seemed to begin and end in the graves of the dead parents, who were only gruesome shadows.

"I will go over this whole ugly matter with Garston at once, just as soon as I see him," was Vreeland's mental decision. "Katharine is either a child-wife of the Dora order, or else far deeper than the sea that we are skimming over now."

It came to him cogently that he had taken her "on trust" largely, and that a current of life's mysterious undertow had swept him along into Senator Garston's power. There was no going back, however.

"It is too late to hesitate now," he mused, as he uneasily gazed back toward America, well knowing that some giant game might be played in his absence.

In the deal there would be no cards for him, however the luck might turn. And there remained but

one golden gleam in the gray clouds. He had that paper with which to dominate Mrs. Willoughby. But, it was a dangerous weapon; it might prove a boomerang.

"Justine Duprez stands between me and all harm. That was a master-stroke! And so I can cut into the game as I wish, on my return. The very first thing I shall do will be to get Katharine's fortune out of Garston's control. He shall face the music. And yet, I can afford no quarrel until that is all safe."

In the month which followed this vain attempt at probing the financial resources of the wife of his bosom, Mr. Harold Vreeland, at the Hotel Cecil, London, found the beautiful Katharine's money-spending power to be something abnormal.

There was a rapid exchange of letters and cable ciphers between Garston and the young broker spy, but the husband was never enlightened as to the nature of the frequent telegrams and letters passing between "Uncle James" and his ward.

It vastly annoyed him—this continued private commerce of ideas.

The questions of the husband were frankly enough met. "I have always been accustomed to do exactly as I pleased," the lady remarked, with a bright, hard smile. Vreeland's face hardened.

"And now, that you are married?" demanded Vreeland, angrily.

"I shall continue to do so, Harold," his wife sweetly replied.

"If you would have me lead a Darby and Joan life, please to remember that sort of thing went out with the 'Rollo books' and 'Faith Gartney's Girlhood!'"

Mr. Harold Vreeland, the husband of a few weeks,



soon realized that while he was doing the clubs and music halls of London, his resplendent wife had quietly gathered up quite a coterie of admiring American men, generally conversationally lumped as "the Western gang."

These ardent cavaliers seemed to be all wifeless, and, strangely enough too, without mothers or sisters. "'Uncle James' friends," was Mrs. Vreeland's saving clause, when at last her angered husband remonstrated at their increasing circle. He was beginning to be agnostic as to her guilelessness.

And on their removal to Paris, where certain of these "friends" soon after appeared, Katharine Vreeland bravely continued "to do as she pleased," and her now bitter husband partook himself to sparkling wine and "the sights of Paris."

He was driven along from day to day, for he had no reliable news from the seat of war. He realized that he was alone in the world and without one trusty friend. His wife was only a bright enigma.

"The lone-hand game has its disadvantages, I perceive," was his bitter secret comment, as he tired of the Hotel Continental—the perfunctory drives in the Bois, the open summer amusements—and visibly fretted at his wife's endless shopping.

Even with Garston's substantial bribe, he began to see that Mrs. Katharine Vreeland's "separate estate" was to become a very "burning question"—in the near future.

She was a "money-eater" of the first class.

"Let us get back to New York," he moodily said after one of a series of wordy recriminations. "With all my heart," placidly retorted the "beautiful Mrs. Vreeland," for she had now acquired that professional



designation in the journals and the cant phrases of the uneasy floating "American circle" of Parisian high life.

Harold Vreeland was now mentally tired of the by-play of marital fencing. He realized, in all their varied encounters, that she was calmly superior at every clash.

Bright, bold and ready, she "came back at him" every time, and he was quietly cornered by that flashing rapier, her tongue. What man can prevail against that two-edged sword?

But one resource was left. He had run the gamut of sullenness, persuasion, a bit of bullying, some pleading and even a touch of lofty tenderness, but her point was carried high, her wrist easy, and her blade opposed to him at every turn.

He could not avouch himself a mere fortune-hunter, and so, he took refuge in an ominous and expectant silence. "I will get hold of her estate, and then curb her extravagance," he brooded.

His worst fears as to the "underground railroad" communications of the "uncle" and ward were realized when he finally received a positive request of Senator Garston for an immediate return.

"I want you at once. I wish to lay out our plans for the winter. And if I am to trap this underhanded, intrigant Mrs. Willoughby, I must finish my work before the opening of the session of Congress, and our committees will begin soon to meet. Come on, with no delay." The words were almost mandatory, and they annoyed him strangely.

Returning from his banker's with this letter, he found his wife's two maids busied in packing up all her effects. He was startled, but took the defensive.

Something impelled him to keep the news to himself. "I am tired of Paris," shortly said his wife, as she recognized the drifting odor of an absinthe frappée. "We can just catch the Gascogne, and so, I have ordered all my bills sent in. You must attend to them, and then, secure our passage."

"Let me know their probable amount," gruffly answered the husband, as he departed for the steamer office. He was beginning to feel a master hand now.

"She had the news before I received it," he growled. "And I swear I will make it my pleasing duty to bring 'Uncle James' to book, on my return. I will get her property into my hands, and control it.

"She would beggar even a Vanderbilt, an Astor or a Goelet, if given a free hand." Vreeland aspired to the conquest of this defiant beauty in rebellion.

It so happened that the game as laid out by "Uncle James" suited all three; but, while he thirsted to see Justine Duprez once more and to confer with Doctor Albergh, Vreeland was really anxious at heart to re-enter the comparative protection of his Wall Street office.

"By Jove! I am at least between the lines there," he mused. "I can frighten both sides, and so, guard myself."

It was on the Gascogne that he watched Katharine VanDyke Norreys as the Count de Millefleurs (a young attaché going over on his first appointment) bent over her steamer chair.

"This marriage has only hung a millstone around my neck," he resentfully brooded. "And I wonder if I was only brought in to relieve 'Uncle James.' " It was a mean suspicion, but it clung closely to him.

He was now the prey of ugly thoughts, and fleeting fears disturbed "the sleep of Richard."

There were times when he feared for the safety of the document so deftly hidden away. The copy had been artfully deposited (under receipt) in a Belgian branch bank in Paris, under an assumed name, and the banker's receipt was now sewed in his waistcoat. "Thank God! That is all safe!" he sighed.

He little reflected that one day, laughing over the "Agony Column" of the London *Times*, his eye had paused at the name "Martha Wilmot." Some trace of familiarity, some fleeting memory caused him to read the few lines.

"Handsome reward and the most complete immunity guaranteed. Greatly to your advantage. Communicate in any way."

The signature, "New York," followed by an address, closed the expensively placed announcement.

"Some relic of man's folly and woman's frailty!" he laughed. "The old, old game goes on forever."

And yet, he little dreamed that Hugh Conyers and handsome Dan Daly were now the right and left hand men of Judge Hiram Endicott, who was engaged in some very interesting metropolitan researches.

In far-away New York, there was the veiled duel of two fearless intellects going on, even in the summer days, when the town was empty.

Mrs. Elaine Willoughby was again the radiant mistress of Lakemere, although she spent a portion of her time in town at the Circassia.

There was now a strange glow of happiness shining on the splendid woman's face, and the services of Doctor Hugo Alberg were permanently discontinued.

It was impossible for the revengeful Teuton to

learn the reason from Justine Duprez. The courteous terms of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby's letter, inclosing a check for his annual account, were too unmistakable to be misconstrued even by the dense German. It was a *congè* not to be misunderstood. His Waterloo!

And, in a roundabout way he had also learned that Judge Endicott and his nephew made up the whole social circle at Lakemere, with Hugh Conyers as a permanent summer guest.

Hugo Alberg had sworn an oath that Harold Vreeland should recoup him for the loss of his star patient. He now only awaited the return of his proposed victim "to levy the Rhine dues."

A visit to the South Fifth Avenue rooms where Justine had vicariously entertained him in the old days, gave him the news, by the mouth of the old denizen, that "*la pauvre Justine*" was tied down at Lakemere.

"Some one have robbed ze lady last year, and now Justine is ze prisonnaire to watch ze garderobe all ze while; and only ze travail and ze solitude! *V'la tout! Pauvre Justine! Elle vent bien partir pour la France.*" The doctor hungrily awaited Vreeland's return for a bleeding process.

No one but the Frenchwoman herself knew how tightly the coils were wound around her. Shaking in fear, left without the secret protection of her traitorous tempter, Vreeland, she dared not try to break away from Lakemere, for she now feared the gleaming wrist-irons.

To run way would be only to invite an instant arrest, and she panted for the time of the winter's gaieties. She would have a chance perhaps then to slip away unknown.

Her plan was already formulated. A simulated illness, a last "bleeding" of Harold Vreeland, and then, a return to dear Paris. Once again on French soil, she would be safe. For Paris would soon swallow her up. The vicious child would be hidden in the mighty bosom of the Mother of all Wickedness.

"Ah! he shall pay," she muttered, as her velvety eyes rested, lit up with a strange fire, on the beautiful woman whose iron hand now held her so firmly. "She and the Kelly—how I could drive a knife into their hearts!" she hissed.

"But Justine must wait; gold first, gold—and then *la liberté* shall be mine."

When "Harold Vreeland and wife" were duly domiciled at the Hotel Savoy, he was not astonished at the proximity of "Uncle James" at the Plaza Hotel; but, even on the pier, when the Senator met them, Vreeland noted the ravages of some overmastering passion in the strong man's face.

The eyes were brilliant and unsteady, there was a foreign irritability in his abrupt manner, and Vreeland's attempts at a *tête-à-tête* were only met with a sharp command "to get inside his old business lines" as soon as he could; and Vreeland, humbled, kept his temper.

"I must have you back in the traces again," sharply cried Garston. "And, I would get up to Lake-mere to-night if I were you. See Mrs. Willoughby, and get safe on the old basis.

"The stock market is humming, and I will soon have need of you in Wall Street. I trust no one there but you."

Harold Vreeland hastened away to the office, and found the same unimpassioned greeting which had



always characterized Horton Wyman. And in the rush, they were now glad to have his aid in their increasing affairs.

"You will go, of course, up to Lakemere to-night?" said Noel Endicott. "I have already telegraphed your arrival to Mrs. Willoughby."

In a stolen detour, Vreeland arranged for an early morning interview with Doctor Alberg, and then he passed the "Circassia" on his way to the train after dinner.

The flat demand of janitor Helms for "backsheesh" keenly angered a man already enraged by "Uncle James' " quiet appropriation of the first evening with that hawk-eyed free-lance of marital beauty, Mrs. Katharine Vreeland, "whose remarkable loveliness had created such a London and Paris sensation."

"I will soon cut the Gordian knot between these two," growled Vreeland, as he descended from the waiting carriage at Lakemere. "I will either have my wife and her property to myself, or else 'Uncle James' will show his hand, to the very last card." He was beginning to be reckless in a blind jealousy.

The welcome of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby to her returned protégé was merely a complacently cordial one, and yet, in half an hour, Vreeland bore away the assurance of lulled suspicions and his continued business relation.

"I shall soon call upon Mrs. Vreeland and assure myself by inspection of her married happiness," was the last greeting of the hostess, whose other guests, if any, were invisible.

"I will send for you to the 'Circassia' next week, and give you my general directions for some business which is impending."

"That woman has found a new happiness. Her life is now complete," was the keen-eyed schemer's comment as he sauntered away toward the park gates, where the impatient horses awaited his return.

A flitting form in the dusky garden walks led him toward the "lovers' labyrinth," behind the unforgettable summer house. His one friend was on watch.

"Justine!" he gasped, and he hastened to stealthily join her in the deepened gloom of the trees. A new fear smote upon his startled nerves.

There was the velvet-eyed Frenchwoman in waiting, and her passionate words, her panting breast and gleaming eyes told him of an unbroken tie, the bond of their guilty past.

The startled woman fled away at the sound of distant voices, while Vreeland, wildly agitated at heart, hastened to his carriage.

"The enemy are on their lines," he defiantly said. "I must strike a blow somewhere, for Elaine Willoughby's vengeance is not dead, but sleepeth. She has not been deceived.

"And, Justine is a virtual prisoner. If she were to tell all!" He stopped short, for his heart bounded in agony. "I must remove that document," he muttered. "For, even she may become an enemy." He had always distrusted all men and his marital experience led him now to distrust all women—even Justine.

As he dashed down the road to the railway station, Vreeland noted an athletic lad easily following the springing horses, mounted on a racing bicycle.

The fact that the same lad sauntered into the smoking-room of the car, and patiently dallied with a cigarette, never intimated to the unconsciously shadowed

man that the schoolboy follower was tracing out his every movement.

But, officer Dan Daly smiled victoriously next day when he heard Mary Kelly's brother tell of Vreeland's brief tryst with Justine, and his long interview with Doctor Alberg in South Fifth Avenue. "I'll get him yet, in the very act," he cheerfully prophesied, "with that stolen paper in his hand."

"The trap is nearly ready to spring," complacently reflected the Roundsman, as he ordered a night and day watch at the peep-hole which controlled the interior of Justine Duprez's rooms.

"I have sworn not to marry Mary Kelly till I've put the ornaments on that rascal." He glanced lovingly at a pair of spring-steel handcuffs of his own especial selection. His fancy jewelry!

The days gliding along rapidly as Harold Vreeland dropped into his old groove of the "automatic business relations" in Wall Street found him still the victim of adverse currents, and wavering in the blasts of contrary-blowing winds. He made no headway toward a solid footing.

Socially, the return of the Vreelands was an event of moment, and the tide of unrestrained gaiety rose high around the now frankly defiant wife. There were soon those gay cavaliers, Merriman, Wiltshire and Rutherfordstone, in attendance, "the Three Guardsmen" of the defiant young Western queen.

And the ever amiable Mrs. Volney McMorris and a flock of semi-detached women of the younger married set gathered to the feast.

"There was racing and chasing on Cannobie lea," and the brilliant young matron was soon classed as a

"Madame Benoiton," *jamais chez elle!* And Vreeland soon followed her example, living also in the open.

In the hotel corridors of the Savoy, the curious shaven servitors often listened to the sounds of vigorous marital debate, wherein the low growl of Vreeland followed the strident soprano of Mrs. Katharine.

For, "Uncle James" had not yet been brought to book! And the young husband was brutally sullen.

There had been several bitter exchanges of hidden menaces between the two men at the Hotel Plaza. "I am fighting the fight of my life, Vreeland, now, over some great Western properties," gruffly answered Senator Garston.

"I've no time now to go into Katharine's affairs. Ask her; she will tell you that all is right.

"And I am, besides, carrying on a half-arm, in-fighting duel with that devil of a woman.

"I need you in your place to keep her quiet, and whether you wish to or not, you shall wait. That's all." The iron fist of the statesman made the glasses ring in an angry emphasis.

"You had better watch over your wife and keep her friendly with Mrs. Willoughby than try to budge me. I need both your help now, and, I propose to have it," was Garston's last shot, as he strode away. Certainly "Uncle James" did not mince matters.

And as the days drifted on, Vreeland became an object of remark, even in the hurry of Wall Street. His wife seemed to be on terms of a frank social intimacy with the Lady of Lakemere, but the man whom all had envied was rapidly becoming a profitable habitu  of the Caf  Savarin. It was the beginning of the end of the "splendid run of luck."

The funds received from Senator Garston, his pur-

chase price, had been seriously depleted by the young wife's extravagance, and soon, both roundsman Dan Daly and the cool Noel Endicott laid before Mrs. Elaine Willoughby the proof of Harold Vreeland's heavy outside speculations in the "active stocks." The desperate man was "plunging" now blindly.

Both of these secret agents marveled, in their different interviews, when the Queen of the Street answered the mute inquiries of their eyes:

"Just let him go on; do nothing whatever to interrupt him. Only report all to me." And onward dashed Vreeland toward unknown reefs of woe.

She knew, too, that a haggard-eyed man often stole over the walls of Lakemere, like a thief in the night, now, to meet Justine Duprez, who was just beginning in her own cowardly heart, to wonder whether a frank confession might not save her.

For there were no "sure tips" now to aid Harold Vreeland's redoubled plunging, and the "strong spirit of wine" was burning away the brain of the man whose once handsome face was now distorted with racking emotions and bloated by cognac. He was on a steep "down grade."

"He may kill me!" tremblingly whispered Justine, who secretly counted up her gains safely stored away in Paris. "I might tell them all, and then go away over there. Dare I speak?"

She began to watch, with a sinking heart, the clear, unflinching eyes of her mistress, now glowing in all the awakened love of her satisfied motherhood.

"Not yet, not yet, only at the very last!" was the cowardly woman's decision, as she crept to the safety of her room. The French maid's cowardly terror escaped not her mistress' eyes.



If she had known that "Martha Wilmot" had secretly crossed the Atlantic and was now hidden away under Roundsman Daly's charge, that news would have brought Justine at once, a shivering culprit, to her mistress' feet. And now, others than Vreeland were playing a sure and waiting game.

But the downward curve was now slippery under Harold Vreeland's uneasy feet. He had thrown off all his retentive watchfulness, and he even roughly repulsed Doctor Alberg and Janitor Helms, who hounded him to the apartments at the Elmleaf, where the suave Bagley still welcomed his unhappy master.

Brooding there at night after the double life of his Wall Street duties, and his private plunging, Harold Vreeland at last formulated a direct demand upon Senator Garston for money. He stood now on the brink of personal ruin.

The market had gone sadly against him. Loss on loss had swept away the great sum which he had received as a bribe, and his wife's recurrent extravagance at last led him to draw the fifteen thousand dollars of his salary for the current year.

Noel Endicott handed over the check without a word, and the fact was soon the property of Roundsman Daly. "I'll gather him in when that money is gone," chuckled Daly. "He is near to the end of his rope now."

"I can see the white hand that is throttling him!" muttered the blunt policeman. "It's the mistress. She will soon bring him to his knees, and maybe there'll be no work left for me to do," he said with a professional sigh of regret. For, he had set his heart on "running Vreeland in." "I'll have him, dead or alive, yet," the policeman swore.

But sterner than all the blows of Fate was the blunt rebuff of Senator Garston, when Vreeland, with burning eyes, demanded a considerable money advance.

"I gave you enough money for four years at least. You have your own income down there; what the devil have you done with it?"

The haggard man murmured complaints of his wife's extravagance. There was his whole line of privately held stocks in danger now, and the market was faltering. The Senator read the truth in his eyes.

"See here, Vreeland!" angrily shouted Garston. "You've been drinking far too much of late. I will see that your wife has money—for herself, but not for you. I hear that you are deep in outside speculations. If so, remember the old remark about a fool and his money."

Harold Vreeland turned without a word and left his secret enemy, now his master. "If I only dared to use the secret of the document!" he raged, as he sought the hospitality of valet Bagley at the Elmleaf.

There were days now when he did not go to the office where the business of "Wyman & Vreeland" hummed merrily along.

Days, too, when he did not return to Mrs. Katharine Vreeland's informal court at the Hotel Savoy.

"If I only dared!" he growled. But then he reflected that any use of the document would probably "land him behind the bars."

He dissembled his rage, as he returned late that night to the separate apartments he now used at the Savoy.

In the hall, as he lay in a wakeful unrest, he heard two servants chattering. "The old Senator is here all the while; I guess he is the real head of the family."

And then the disgraced husband remembered Alida Hathorn's parting malediction: "I leave it to the future to punish you."

He arose and sought the brandy bottle with uncertain steps. For he realized at last that whatever game the Senator and his wife were playing, he was counted only a mere pawn. And, the game of Life was going against him now!

His power had departed from him, and before he showed his distorted face next day on Wall Street his line of private stocks was sold out "under the rule," and he was really a beggar—stripped of all his ill-gotten gains, when he returned that night to face his wife, who, richly dressed for an evening's outing, passed by him with a silent sneer. Truly a marriage *à la mode*. He was at bay now!

Vreeland turned into his own room with a muttered curse, and after a vicious pull at the brandy bottle, rushed out upon the streets to wander aimlessly in the throngs of the night.

For he was chased out by the maddening thoughts brought to his half-crazed mind by a chance glance at the *Evening Journal*.

"A social note" of interest heralded the fact that "Mr. and Mrs. James Potter had returned from Europe, and that the hospitable VanSittart mansion on Fifth Avenue would soon be opened to society once more, as well as the beautiful old colonial manor house of Oakhurst. This union of two old families has united hearts as well as millions," etc.

"By God! I will not live in New York to have her laugh at my downfall!" swore Vreeland, as he raced along with his coat opened to the chill autumn air. The menace of her curse came back: "I leave it to

the future to punish you!" And at last, he was a broken and ruined man—a human wreck.

On this sharp evening of early October, Senator-elect James Garston sat alone, moodily gazing into the cheerful wood fire in his sumptuous room at the Plaza. He watched the bright blaze for an hour, until the hickory billets had turned into white ashes, flaking the tiles at his feet.

On the table at his side lay an unfinished letter, and by the dying embers the man who had the world at his feet groaned. "Ashes of life! The ashes of a dead past."

For, by the side of his last passionate appeal lay one or two tattered letters traced in a girlish hand.

Garston walked the floor with a strong, resounding tread, as he went over every detail of the veiled duel of the last months.

In the glass at either end of the room he saw his own strong, resolute face, the silvered temples framed in iron-gray hair, his brow furrowed with the lines of care which neither his honors nor his millions could efface.

On the table lay his watch, pocketbook and revolver. He paused, and picked up the heavy Smith & Wesson aimlessly. The man who had faced death in a hundred forms bitterly smiled as the trigger yielded to his practiced finger. There, he held ready fate in his hand!

"Here is either vengeance or release," he gloomily muttered. "If we were to go together."

And then his face softened. "Not yet! Not yet!" he murmured. "I shall live to look upon my child's face."

And so, he had honestly cast up the accounts of his life, not sparing himself. He knew that Elaine Willoughby

was now surrounded by an alert body-guard of detectives; that her volunteer guardians were with her daily. Either Judge Endicott, his nephew or the grave-faced Hugh Conyers was always an inmate of Lakemere on every visit she made to that lonely spot, and his own detectives had warned him that a special policeman was also an inmate of her household, while Roundsman Dan Daly was a grand outside guard. He dared not approach her. Could he lure her to his side?

Ignorant of his wife's secret warfare with Harold Vreeland, Senator Garston saw in all these precautions only the confirmation of her stern sentence of banishment from her presence.

He knew, too, now of the practical victory of her trip around the world. Elaine Willoughby had made her word good. The missing girl had simply disappeared! And he had been unable to reach the girl in order to blacken the mother. He was powerless now. All his craft, backed by money, had been met and vanquished.

When he had paid off all his detectives in a sullen despair, the Chief of the "Inquiry Bureau" had admirably remarked: "Your enemy has certainly handled herself superbly, Senator."

"Force is of no use. She has been guided by some matchless intellect. We easily traced the girl over to Dresden.

"There she became an inmate of a private Klinik, which, bowered in gardens and surrounded with stone walls, is guarded like the Kaiser's palace.

"Fortified by the stern German laws, the Doctor in charge would be able to resist anything but a criminal warrant. He owns the property used by the Klinik.



And so far as we know the two women have never met. Mrs. Willoughby turned up first in Vienna, but we lost her at Port Said. God knows where she was in those two months.

"The girl went into the Klinik and never emerged; that is our final report. You know what your orders were—no scandal, no publicity. We tried to get an agent into the establishment. Ah! Useless! It is a close corporation."

The Senator on this lonely night was happy that he had only divulged to his agents his desire to find the girl for reasons of an old, bitter intrigue about her property interests.

Too well he knew that Margaret Cranstoun's clear voice, if once lifted to tell the story of his past, would damn him forever. The toga would then be but a public badge of shame. And so, fear stayed his strong hand.

And a hundred vain solutions of the enigma had haunted his fancy, for he himself felt assured that the women had met in Europe, and that his daughter was now lost to him forever.

He groaned as he pondered over the sweet face smiling up from the dearly bought picture. His sentence of a living death weighed heavily upon him now. The daughter whom he yearned for would perhaps never call him "Father!"

"By Heavens!" he cried, in his anguish. "Margaret may have the power to hold herself aloof from me. I have lost all my rights to her. There is the past to face. She is right as to herself, but, the child! Nature's laws, the laws of God and man, give me the right to a hearing. It is for my child alone to forgive or to condemn her father. And, I could atone! She

could have all—an honored name, a solid fortune, and a repentant man's blessing. 'Only to hear her voice, only to see her face,' " and he broke into bitter sobs. For he dared not deceive his hungry heart. He was wretched, lonely and repentant.

The wretched man little knew how ably Roper had fulfilled his trust as personal guard, how wisely Sara Conyers had concerted her measures.

Secretly smuggled away at night from the Dresden Klinik, Romaine Garland had been transported to Copenhagen in a private car, and, on beautiful Lake Malar, near stately Stockholm, an old chateau, now a secluded sanitarium, had given its welcome shelter to the three travelers. Judge Endicott's all-seeing eye followed their every movement, and Roper had nobly upheld his trust.

The heart-hungry mother, hastening from Port Said to Odessa, and thence to St. Petersburg, had crossed the Baltic to Stockholm, and then, while the baffled detectives were still watching in Dresden, had clasped to her heart the girl whom the lame secretary's chance affection had given back to her.

And what a delicious apprenticeship in motherhood was opened to the loving woman! A fairy heaven!

There, by the blue waves of Lake Malar, the mother learned of Alva Whiting's peaceful girlhood days in western New York. How those who had given her a home had died leaving her their honest name and a legacy of love in the technical education which had fitted her to gain a living. And then, came the ordeal! The pathway of a maidenly Una among the lions and jackals of Greater New York City.

And in God's mystic providence, the strange path which had led her to the temptations of the great

restless city was made only a return to the bosom of the woman who had lost her child in the shifting of the mock philanthropic "Home." And how fondly the happy mother clung to her wonderfully restored lost lamb!

The dark shadows which rested on the heart of the repentant husband threw their gloomy shade now over the heart-happy mother. For the same fear possessed them both. The old fear! That puerile fear—and yet, the most potent: What will the world say? Garston feared the black record of his cowardly abandonment, and the victorious mother found that, though innocent, she dared not tell the whole truth.

Innocent at heart, realizing the only means to save her child from the man whom she secretly feared, when Elaine Willoughby went back, incognito, to reappear at Vienna on her homeward way, she only caught her loving child to her breast in a torrent of silent tears, when Romaine Garland murmured: "You never speak of my father!"

"Do not ask me yet, my darling!" she sobbed. "I want you all to myself now. Ask me nothing yet."

And though the Lady of Lakemere had hoodwinked all of Garston's spies, though she had returned unanswered, the letters from her husband sent to her by messenger on her return, and held the secret of his guilty past over his head, she felt that this armed inactivity could not continue forever. The battle must be fought out, and either lost or won. She renewed her courage.

She could not lie to her child, and her eyes had dropped before the appealing glances of the restored one. A hundred varied plans were considered on that long ocean return voyage.

Too well she knew that she dared not settle down in Europe and leave Harold Vreeland's unpunished crime behind her.

The secret hidden in the stolen document was momentous! She could not abandon her comrades in their speculations without vindicating her trust in honor.

An option, under the guarantee of her faithful syndicate friends to allow "certain persons" to purchase "certain stocks" at a fixed valuation was in that fateful record. Its loss meant the ruin of many reputations. Perhaps, too, the crash of vast fortunes.

The betrayal of a trust which Alynton had imposed upon her, and for which she had been selected by the "secret syndicate"—the gods of local finance! She must leave the secret circle with clean hands.

So far, she was safe!

As yet, the thief had not dared to use it. Its fatal power was still veiled from her dearest foe, James Garston, the husband of her youthful flower, whom all men once honored as Arnold Cranstoun.

"My God!" shuddered Elaine. "If Garston should obtain that document it would be my ruin. All would believe that I had sold their secrets to others. I would be at his mercy. It must not be.

"If he—Vreeland—can be trapped, if a silent surrender is safely effected, then I could give up my trust, leave America, and seek happiness abroad with Romaine, my beautiful darling."

But though she knew that Harold Vreeland would dare to make no public use of the document, though she was positive that fear of political scandal would seal James Garston's lips, she dared not deny, in her lone watches under the stars, that the man whom she

had banished was still her husband—"till death do us part."

And if Vreeland was the thief, he could sell her to shame in all men's eyes if Garston would shield him.

She knew further that there was no mercy in Garston's love-maddened heart now!

And a bitter thought haunted her over the dark Atlantic waters. "My child's future! She can not marry under the suspicion of illegitimate birth, and she shall never deem her mother to have been a guilty wanton."

Even Judge Endicott and the chivalric Hugh Conyers knew but half the truth. Both had assumed that there had been an early and unhappy marriage, and both only believed that Elaine Willoughby was merely fighting for the custody of a child whom they knew not to be of legal age.

"If they knew more, I would either have to clear myself by the whole truth, or else be disgraced in their eyes," she murmured.

And on the instant call of her New York agents she had returned now to strike a death blow to all Harold Vreeland's criminal schemes. But she was so sadly weak in her own defenses, against the laws of nature, of God's holy sacrament of marriage, and the pleading eyes of her innocent child! And yet Vreeland's demoralization forced desperate measures upon her now. If he should die or abscond, then, there was ruin to face.

And on this night, when her husband mourned in agony over his forfeited paradise and his childless age, the unhappy wife and mother only awaited the moment when Harold Vreeland would fall into the



snares so skillfully set for him. That victory won, then she would bid adieu to the "Street's" mad ventures, her secret trust once resigned, peace, love and happiness awaited her at Lake Malar. But safety first, peace afterward. She felt whither the undercurrent of speculation had swept her. On a lee shore!

"I can tell Romaine all when she is my very own, and she shall choose between us then, and judge us both.

"She alone has the right to the truth."

This vow upon her knees had quieted Margaret Cranstoun's heart, for she only now awaited Roundsman Dan Daly's coming triumph to summon Senator Alynton.

Once the document was honorably out of her hands, then the Queen of the Street could abdicate, and go "far from the madding crowd," where "beyond their voices there is peace." The hour of loathing her excited environment had come at last.

It seemed as if some subtle commune of spirit had brought the long-estranged husband and wife together in spirit on this very evening, for Margaret Cranstoun dreamed of the loyal husband of her youth, when she fell asleep, murmuring "Lead, kindly Light." There were angels pleading with them both—angels of white, unfolded wings. For the child's sake, they pleaded for a hearing.

And the next morning she was shaken at heart, as the gusty pines are thrilled by the wild winds of night, when she read the long appeal wrung from Arnold Cranstoun's heart by the hours of his lonely midnight agony. His agony had overmastered the proud spirit at last.

The deserted wife's tears fell on the blotted pages

over which the strong man had leaned in all the ecstasy of a last appeal.

He knew that there would be an answer, for his messenger was bidden to return.

And all that day, James Garston waited, while his estranged wife trembled at the voice of her own heart, and bowed her head over her daughter's picture in an agony of speechless love. She dared all for herself, but only to save the child of her hungry heart.

She feared the fatal sentence of these awful words of Holy Writ: "For the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the heads of the children." That thought brought her to her knees now, and she walked alone in the dark valley of silent sorrows.

Brought to bay by the wild appeal, the excited woman realized that she dare not confer with either Alynton, Endicott or Conyers. The still unsoiled woman-heart revolted at the unveiling of all the sorrows of a shadowed life—those secret sorrows which had haunted her in all the gilded scenes of a strange prosperity, her burden carried under the veil of secrecy—her galling chain of secret sorrows.

"For the child's sake!" she murmured, as she vainly essayed to answer her recreant husband's proposals.

A dozen times she had read over his last logical conclusion: "If you and I are to respect the untroubled heart of the innocent child whom I have never seen, then we must leave it to her alone to decide in the future as to whether she shall go on through life as a fatherless girl.

"You might be taken away; I might pay the penalty of nature. What would become of our child then? Can you answer? And even if I am a husband no

longer, you have no power to decree that I am not a father. And you and I alone can settle a situation leading on to madness or despair. As for the spoliation of our daughter, I will prevent that, but is that all?—answer me, for God's sake—is that all of life?—the mere money provision? Dare you say it is?"

Elaine Willoughby recognized at once his coldly practical mind in the propositions.

"For all our sakes," he pleaded, "I will die to the world as Arnold Cranstoun, if you agree; and I swear before God, that if you agree that I will only approach Romaine Garland as a stranger, unless in later years you may lift the ban. For never lived man or woman who could foretell the future workings of the chainless human heart. Let us make some joint provision for her future safety. In God's name—for the child's sake." His words echoed in her heart, and not in vain.

A meeting at the Hotel Belgravia in a week's time was the proposal.

A family friend of Senator Garston's had placed his apartments at the husband's disposal. "We are neither of us known there; you can previously enter the hotel and observe the rooms.

"In the evening at nine o'clock on the day you select, I will be at the door, and you can close the sorrows of a whole life, in a half-hour given up to mercy."

"For the child's sake, be it so!" she cried as she read over the proposal once more.

Her task was to bring every letter and relic of their married days and to witness their destruction.

"Then our child can never be shadowed by my guilty past," his hand had traced.

"I am sure of your silence. I will go on undisgraced to the end of my career. I will cease to pursue you and her.

"I am to give you the receipt of the International Trust Company for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars of United States bonds, registered in the name of Romaine Garland.

"And I am to leave her in my will one-half of all my property. There is then to be silence—oblivion; for me repentance, for you peace, and so, for her in time, the enjoyment of her own.

"Should she learn from you in later years that James Garston was her father, there will at least be no cloud upon her name, and I leave the key of the future in your hands.

"This I would guarantee before either of the three men whom you trust; but, I implore peace and silence, for the child's sake.

"Our only guarantee in this interview of good faith is the one unbroken tie between us, the child whom I have never seen."

It was late in the day when James Garston read the lines traced by the hand which had once trembled lovingly in his own.

"I will come! I will trust to you once more, under the protection of the memories of all my sorrows, but only for the child's sake. Our past is dead. Let us place the seal of silence upon its tomb. I will do as you bid me."

There was a strange light in Senator Garston's face as he hurried out of the Plaza Hotel, and when in the corridor, he met Harold Vreeland, he wrested himself from that desperate gamester's clutches. He dared not break away from the haggard outcast. There was

the meeting with Elaine—the one aim now of his awakened soul.

“Come into the writing-room,” said the Senator, after he had heard an appeal which caused him to fear that the man’s mind was wavering.

“Remember, sir,” sternly said the Western millionaire, “I know where the money is going. And it is the very last dollar of mine that you will ever see. Your wife”—Garston stopped, shamefaced, for the shadow of a darling sin now rose up between him and the new-born hope of meeting his own child in the coming years.

The spell of Margaret Cranstoun was strong upon him now. “I can atone; Katharine shall not live to suffer poverty,” he groaned, as Vreeland sped away with a check for forty thousand dollars. And so, a manly throb of remorse made him generous to Katharine Norreys’ hoodwinked husband.

The rain was falling in torrents when the hooded form of a stately woman descended at the Hotel Belgravia on a storm-darkened night a week later. The drenched cabman wondered at the hurried liberality of his fare, and then hastened away far beyond the row of blinking lights.

Up the stairway to the first story, the visitor sped with no uncertain foot, the “parlor watch” noticing with surprise the white robes beneath the lady’s shrouding cloakings. For it was a fearful night without; those festal robes were but a mockery in the storm-lashed darkness.

“One of our regulars caught out in this squall,” sleepily muttered the waiter, resuming his novel.

Onward, guided by a surely retentive memory, the



woman sped through the halls, and pressed her hand upon a doorknob which yielded to her touch.

The door was quickly closed, and there, surrounded by all the belongings of a happy family circle, the long Sundered foes met in silence before a cheerful fire which blazed upon the hearth.

In James Garston's startled eyes there was an expression of wondering mystery. For with a woman's self-protective instinct, his estranged wife had eluded her household at the "Circassia," and stolen away from the dinner circle, robed in a costume of stainless white.

Down the deserted side stairway, she had fled, swathed in secretly purchased storm wrappings such as a woman of the people might wear. And now, she looked strangely young and fair as he sprang toward her. She had not been recognized by the hotel attaches; no one had seen her leave the "Circassia."

And neither Justine, the watchful, nor the amanuensis knew—not even the butler detective—that their mistress had gone forth in the storm, her own apartment doors being locked. She had victoriously passed all the dangers which she feared. A wild haste now possessed her; only to be safe at home again!

In silence Elaine Willoughby placed a bundle upon the table, and then, the eyes of the unhappy couple met.

"It is all there—everything," faltered Margaret Cranstoun. "Hasten, for I must save myself; I can not linger. This visit must be kept a secret from all, for the child's sake. Examine and destroy them!"

There was that in her eyes which compelled obedience, and the beautiful woman stood clutching at a table, as Garston, with a mighty effort at self-control, glancing rapidly at each faded token, cast them one

by one into the fire. Ashes of life, "dead fruits of the fugitive years!"

The flames merrily leaped up, and without the wild storm lashed the window-panes. In a few moments, the work of destruction was complete.

Margaret Cranstoun started back as her husband faced her, for some overmastering emotion now quickly convulsed his strong face. A strange fear palsied her tongue. She had never seen that ashen look upon his strong face in life before.

"There is the Trust Company's receipt," he said, speaking as if in a dream, while his eyes roved over her loveliness, as she stood there with her trembling hands clasped on her heaving bosom. A woman to draw men to her feet—a throbbing, passionate, love-haunted queen—the apotheosis of love!

"Do you agree to my proposition about my will?" the Senator slowly said; "and I may at some future day hope to see—"

He paused abruptly, for Margaret Cranstoun reeled. Her strength was failing; there were strange shadows in the room; the fitful fire glared in weird flashes!

"Let me go! Let me go!" she cried. "You can write to me as before."

"I must go!"

For there were strange shadows gathering on his convulsed face.

She turned as if to flee. Her husband was too quick for her.

With a single bound he reached the door and locked it.

"Margaret!" he wildly cried, as he crushed her to his breast, "the past is dead. Its record lies there, ashes to ashes—the ashes of a dead life!"

"Let me live! Let us go on to the end together.

"No one would know. If we were married now, in due form, the silence of the past would be unbroken. It is my last prayer. Forgive!"

The frightened woman was struggling in his relentless grasp, as he pleaded "for the child's sake!"

She made one last despairing effort to break his frenzied hold upon her, but she stood there helpless and transfixed in horror, as his arms relaxed and he suddenly sank at her feet, lying there prone upon the tapestried floor. The Dark Angel's wings had touched his pallid brow.

The shriek of horror was frozen on her lips by a sudden fear, and then grasping at her draperies, she fled away through the open door of the next apartment. She dared not glance behind her, for death was there!

Now, between her and that locked door lay the nameless thing which was but now a strong man, the peer of kings! The despairing lover who had died with the last frenzied words of reawakened tenderness upon his lips! The husband of her youth!

The majesty of Death had entered unannounced, and that night, in far-away Sweden, Romaine Garland, praying for the mother whom she had recovered from Shadowland, stirred in the sleep of maidenhood to murmur, "My father!" For in the vast empyrean James Garston had found his child—at last!

A glance showed to the entrapped woman a stout partition wall leading from a window opened into a side court to the long hotel corridor on the other side.

Spurred on by a blind impulse of self-protection, Elaine Willoughby sprang lightly across the dividing

wall and raised the window on the other side of the covered court.

There was no one in the silent corridor. Her beating heart told her that here was safety.

It was but the work of a moment to cast her cloak around her, and a side entrance offered her an unobserved descent to the level of the street.

"If that door should be locked!" was her heart's wild alarm.

But no, it yielded, and then with a swift step she sped along in the storm, not daring to look behind her in the night!

The rains of heaven had cooled her brow as she halted far away before a row of carriages standing before a theater. The sleepy driver only growled "All right," as he heard the words "Central Park West."

He never knew that the half-fainting woman who stopped him on a corner twenty minutes later, was the one possessor of a mystery which was the sensation of the whole city next morning.

"Women are queer creatures!" babbled the sleepy driver, as he sought the nearest saloon, while his fare disappeared under the gloomy darkness of the walls of the "Circassia."

"Now what business could take a decent woman out a night like this?" But he had substantial cause for rejoicing, and he blessed her on her way. For she paid him the price of a life—all unknown to his gratified cupidity.

There was silence in the halls of the "Circassia" as Mrs. Elaine Willoughby swept down the corridors now draped only in her white dinner dress. The dark wraps, cast away on the servants' stairway, told

no story of the undetected outing, and, with a trembling hand, the frightened woman opened the side door of the Pearl boudoir.

An hour later there was hurrying to and fro in her household. "It is one of Madame's old attacks," Justine explained to Doctor Anderson, hastily summoned by the private secretary.

For after instinctively hiding away the document thrust into her bosom, the paper which gave to fatherless Romaine Garland a fortune, Elaine Wilmoughby had fainted away, with her hand upon the bell, as she mechanically summoned help in the hour of her agony. And the price of her safety was a near approach to the grave!

On the next morning the journals of fifty cities told millions of readers of the sudden death of the Western magnate, Senator James Garston, and the various political cabals were busied with selecting his successor. Death had robbed him of the civic crown, and a stately head was lying low.

Senator Alynton, while hurrying from Washington to New York on business, read all the details of the attack of heart failure which had cut off the strong man in the flower of his life.

"This is a serious business," he murmured, but his impassive face never showed his secret solicitude lest the papers of the dead man might expose the operations of a syndicate "for revenue only." He wore the impassive mask of the millionaire politician.

There was the look of a wild despair in Katharine Vreeland's eyes when she awakened her heavy-eyed husband from the sleep of exhaustion the next morning.

"Get up!" she sternly said.



"Here is news to frighten even you into being a man for a day. Senator Garston died last night of heart disease at the Hotel Belgravia."

"Good God! We are ruined!" cried Vreeland.

"For all your fortune was in his hands. You have not a scrap of paper to show for it."

"What do I care for the money!" she sobbed. "I am alone in the world now."

## CHAPTER XV.

## IN THE DARK WATERS.

Senator David Alynton's first duty on reaching the Hotel Belgravia was to hold a private conference with the confidential friend in whose rooms the Senator-elect had so strangely died. The body of the dead millionaire had been removed at once to his own personal apartments at the Hotel Plaza, where the travelers found assembled Garston's lawyer, his physician, with his body servant. The private secretary was in charge, under the superintendence of a cool representative of the International Trust Company.

It touched Alynton to the heart, this lonely death chamber; for it seemed that "there was no one left to mourn for Logan."

It is true that Mrs. Katharine Vreeland, in deepest black, was kneeling silently there at the foot of the coffin, ostentatiously supported by Mrs. Volney McMorris, whose social splendors were judiciously darkened for the time being by bits of crepe, like the veiling of the "bright work" on a fire engine at an old Volunteer Department funeral.

"Are there no near family relatives?" asked Alynton, in a muffled voice, as he gazed upon the majestic frame of the man who had fought himself up from disgrace to the Tantalus cup of triumph. It seemed a dreary, a lonely, an unwept taking-off!

"It seems not," guardedly answered the Trust Company's factotum. "We have his will in charge. The young lady kneeling there will be a large bene-

ficiary, and besides her, there is only one other legatee, who it seems is a ward of Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, the great woman stock operator."

Senator Alynton started in surprise. "As the late Mr. Garston was only a Senator-elect, I presume there will be no Governmental notice taken of his decease.

"We look, therefore, to you, Senator Alynton, to Mr. Haygood Apchurch, his old friend (in whose rooms he died) and to these two interested young women beneficiaries, for all directions as to the funeral."

"That is," hastily added the Trust Company's Cerberus, "if no swarm of hungry relatives, no duplicate wives nor mysterious claimants turn up when the Associated Press dispatches have been read all over America.

"Such things have happened before."

"It seems strange," mused Alynton, after giving a few brief directions, "that such a man lived and died entirely unloved."

But goaded on by self-interest, he hastened away to the "Circassia," after vainly telephoning all over New York for Harold Vreeland. The "rising star" was in a dark eclipse!

At the Hotel Savoy, the suave head clerk, with a sigh, admitted that the young banker's habits were now very "irregular."

"He has not been seen to-day. He went out very early," was the clerk's report, and he vaguely indicated Vreeland's principal operations with an upward sweep of his lily-white hand.

The clerk was a purist in manner, and only beginning himself to drink secretly. He was not yet in the dark waters!

Senator Alynton found Mrs. Elaine Willoughby strictly denied to all visitors. It was to the clear-eyed cripple that he gravely handed his card.

"Please say to Mrs. Willoughby that I must see her before Senator Garston's funeral. I am at the Waldorf, and will come at once on her summons."

On his way to the Belgravia, Senator Alynton read the "copious accounts" in the leading journals. The case seemed to be a clear one. The newspapers confirmed Mr. Haygood Apchurch's statement that the dead millionaire had borrowed his friend's apartments to use a couple of weeks in briefing up a great speech upon "the financial situation." A speech destined never to be delivered!

In fact, some of the drafts of the future masterpiece, and the usual personal contents of a rich man's pocketbook were the only papers found in the rooms. There was not even the foundation stone of a mystery.

The checks, railway passes, club cards, etc., were not accompanied by a single family paper.

It was "justly remarked by all that the country had sustained a great loss in the counsels of so distinguished and successful a Western money magnate as James Garston," etc., in the usual vein.

Alynton glanced over the platitudes as to being "cut off in his prime," the usual references, *de rigueur*, to the "zenith of his powers," and his being a man of "an already national reputation"—the lightly tossed journalistic wreath of immortelles!

One or two daring writers had timidly referred to the long fight which had raised the deceased from a working Western low-grade lawyer in a mining town to a money power in the financial centers of the East and West.

"That no immediate family falls heir to the honorable record of the departed is an element of sadness crowning a lonely career, embittered by many hard struggles with fate."

Such perfunctory phrases covered the gap between the unknown past of the "man who had arrived" and the lonely splendor of his final elevation.

After Alynton had satisfied himself that Mr. Haygood Apchurch knew nothing whatever of Garston's past, the distinguished member of the secret syndicate drove rapidly down to Judge Hiram Endicott's office.

His mind was now agitated with fears of the future of the sugar speculating syndicate of a "few friends."

In his feverish haste to make the living safe he had already forgotten the unloved dead man. He had not disturbed the silent grief of the repentant woman who bent over the pale silent lips now sealed in death.

The eyes were sightless now which had thrilled their unspoken messages into her very soul.

And the stormy heart of James Garston was as cold and pulseless as the marble wherein the tenantless shell would soon lie in the long rest.

Suddenly Katharine Vreeland threw up her arms and fell at the feet of her woman friend, wildly sobbing—

"There lies the only heart in God's world that ever beat for me!"

"Ah! Some one loved him after all," mused the Trust Company's financial representative. "She deserves her good fortune. I wonder does she know of the other one?" His mind was busied with curious conjectures as to the source of the dead man's generosity.

But the gates of the past were swung forever. The



trembling heart of the "Western heiress" held a secret that was now sealed behind the mask of Garston's waxen face.

For the strong man, loyal in his darling sin, was true as steel to the last, and the hidden crime of two lives "left no dark plume as a token."

Alynton, closeted with Judge Endicott, was now urgent in his demand that Mrs. Elaine Willoughby should at once erase the name of the dead Senator from the dangerous document held by her in a mysterious trust. "That document must never see the light." It must be destroyed at once, and a new "round robin" signed.

"It will have to be surrendered now, and a new one made," anxiously said the excited millionaire.

"We owe safety to our living associates, and perfect faith to our allied friends of the Sugar Syndicate."

"Perhaps as Mrs. Willoughby was a close friend of Garston's she may know some of the details of his early life. I wish that you would have her guide me. Go and see her. I am in practical charge of the funeral, and so shall be very busy."

"What can she know?" demanded the old lawyer.

"I'm told by the Trust Company's man that he has left half of his great fortune to a young ward of Mrs. Willoughby's—some young girl." There was a tinkling sound of breakage.

Alynton gazed curiously at the old Judge as he slowly picked up the fragments of his shattered eyeglasses.

"You are right. Do nothing till you hear from me. I will go to her, and come to you at the Waldorf," said the startled lawyer. "She should know of this at once."

"Thank God! He knows nothing of Garston's mad pursuit of Elaine in marriage and his schemes about her child. He even thinks them friends. Better so. But, the girl must return at once. Death has made her way smooth." And Endicott went sighing on his way.

Telephoning for Hugh Conyers, the old advocate hastened to the "Circassia" to a conference with the white-faced invalid who burst into a storm of tears when Endicott told her the story of the strange legacy.

"Let Hugh cable at once to Stockholm. Have them come back here by Havre, without a moment's delay. Let him sign all three of our names, and let him also send a separate cable to Sara that Romaine is to know nothing of the death, and not a word as yet, of this strange legacy. I will inform her of that myself," she sobbed. "It is all so strange, so ghastly," she murmured.

The self-protective instinct of the mother brought to her a new life. "No one knows; no one even suspects. There is not a single whisper. Thank God!" And then she vowed on her knees, when left alone, to be brave and true for the child's sake.

And Hiram Endicott respected her imperial grief. When he returned from dispatching Conyers to recall the fatherless child, he mused: "It is better that I should know nothing more, for there is a strange tangle here."

And so he was not astonished when his client bade him come back to her on the morrow to escort her to the room of Garston's last solemn public reception.

"I must see him again for Romaine's sake. I must look once more upon the face of the father of my child," was the solemn voice of Nature sweeping away

all the meshes of the frail barrier of human hatred which had held them apart.

"God is merciful," she murmured. "Romaine shall never know, and only learn to wonder over the benefaction of an unknown but generous hand.

"And now, his public name, his barren honors can never be soiled by man's cold sneer. It is the blessed nepenthe of the silent grave."

Elaine Willoughby was recalled to a need of stern and instant action by Endicott's demand for the document, the vastly dangerous paper whose existence now alarmed Senator Alynton. And all alert, she bade her schoolboy servitor summon Roundsman Daly instantly.

"I must forego my full vengeance on Vreeland," she murmured, "to save my friends. The paper once regained, I can leave the Street forever, but Vreeland's silence must be first assured. It is better to steal it from its hiding-place, and not wait to trap him there."

She was keenly suspicious of Justine Duprez, who, hollow-eyed and half-defiant, now demanded an absence of a few days on urgent private affairs. The girl's burning fever of fear for her lover was almost an ecstasy of jealous agony. She feared a coming storm.

With a single touch of the bell, the Lady of Lake-mere called in the private detective. "Detain that woman here, even by the strongest use of force, till Roundsman Daly comes," she said, with flashing eyes.

"She is dangerous. Remember! force if needed. And, do not lose her from your sight an instant."

In ten minutes, Daly, with a strange light of battle in

his eyes, stood before Mrs. Willoughby. "It is now just the time to spring the trap!" he said. "I have two men steadily on watch down in South Fifth Avenue. Vreeland has been lurking around here to warn Justine to meet him at once. He intends, I am sure, to leave the country, for I have already arrested Helms and the letter-carrier, Mulholland. You must act, and at once, or you will lose the bird."

"Then," cried Elaine Willoughby, turning ashen in her heart-sinking, "hasten to the rooms yourself. Arrest him! Get the paper! It must come to me alone, whatever happens—remember that. There is human life, public honor and the happiness of innocent hearts all hanging on your success. For God's sake, hasten! Bring me that paper!" A ferocious joy gleamed in Daly's eyes.

He felt for his Colt's police pistol and his steel handcuffs.

"Hold the Frenchwoman tightly. Lock her up by force! I will be here in an hour, and the paper shall reach no one's eyes but mine.

"But as to Justine, let Dobson arrest her, and handcuff her. Give her a good frightening, but watch her that she does herself no harm."

As Daly stole down the side stairs of the "Circassia," there was a muffled scream as the handcuffs closed on the plump wrists of Justine Duprez. It was the beginning of the end, and Harold Vreeland had lost his last friend. He was in the jaws of Fate now.

"Dobson has made sure. Now for my man, and to pay off old scores!" cried Dan Daly, as he sprang into a carriage.

"To South Fifth Avenue!" he cried. "Drive like

hell. I'll make you rich for a year!" he sharply commanded.

Far away, crouching in the squalid room, watching the frail door and listening for the sound of a well-known footstep, haggard-eyed and desperate, Harold Vreeland waited like a wolf at bay. His brain, burning with alcohol, was now reeling with the violence of his emotions.

"Only to square her with money, to get her away to the rendezvous in Paris, or to see her safely in hiding among the French *declassées* here till she can sneak away. Then I'll remove the paper, and after that take the first steamer and seek safety and revenge!

"I can get a steerage suite at Hoboken. There are several steamers to-morrow morning. No one will know, and I've money enough left for a whole year." He felt for the twenty bills of a thousand dollars each which he had held back from the check begged from Garston. A legacy of unsuspected shame!

Tired and wearied, he returned again and again to his brandy flask. And then his head dropped and his cigar fell from his hand as he dropped into a half-drunken stupor.

He awoke at a slight noise and raised his head. He fixed his glazed eyes on the door.

"She is coming!" he muttered. "I'll get the paper out now, and all will be ready for a start."

With a knife, he sprang back the loose plating from the door frame.

Standing on a chair, he had already grasped the paper in his trembling hand when the door suddenly gave way with a crash, and three burly men leaped into the room.

He sprang to the floor, but strong arms seized him.



For the first time in his life, Harold Vreeland felt the snapping of handcuffs. "The jig is up!" cried Daly, facing the astounded culprit.

"I arrest you, Harold Vreeland, for robbing the United States mail," cried a deputy marshal; but Dan Daly had already wrenched the stolen document from the hand of the ruined trickster. He remembered the last injunctions of the woman he served.

It was now safely hidden in his breast and lying against the picture of the girl whom Daly had sworn to make the happiest wife in New York. The one who would rule his little home!

"Hold on to him, boys!" cried Daly, as he stepped away into a side room and anxiously gazed at the paper which he had recovered. Yes, it was the same one, for he had only waited weeks to catch the scoundrel with the document in his unlawful possession. The secret of the hiding-place was his alone. He called the schoolboy a "shadow" no longer, for the work was done.

"Take my carriage. Get back and tell the mistress that I have got the paper she wants. Speak to no one else; and tell her that Vreeland will be put in a cell alone in Ludlow Street Jail as a United States prisoner. He'll have no chance to talk!

"I'll follow you up soon, see her, and then go and have him stowed away. I will bring the paper up to her myself. Hurry now, for God's sake! I'll take Helms and that French devil away later. Tell her not to breathe a word to a living soul. I am acting outside of the law.

"Any one of the stolen letters that we found with Helms will do to convict him with. I've got one here to show up," mused Daly, "and now the three wretches

up there will all be eager to confess. It only remains to nab that scoundrel Alberg, and to face him with the returned Wilmot woman. It's nearly all over. My God! What's that?"

Dan Daly sprang back into the main room, pistol in hand, as a deafening explosion rang out. His eyes rested on a body lying at his feet.

"How did this happen?" he yelled, as one of the detectives excitedly knelt over Harold Vreeland lying there dying on the floor.

The last words came faintly to Vreeland's trembling lips, flecked with a bloody froth:

"Justine, poor girl, tell her—money—oh, God!—water!—water!"—muttered the dying man, as his head fell back. He lay there, the man of art and graces—the man who had played out the lone hand in Life—dead at their feet, with the steel bands still upon his pulseless wrists. It was a barren victory!

"It was all done quick as a flash, Dan!" whispered the disgraced detective. "He was seemingly docile, and asked me for a drink of water as you went out. I turned to get it. He had seen me put back my pistol.

"With his handcuffed hands he swiftly plucked it out, then one touch of the trigger, and there he lies."

"It is the will of God," said Daly, gravely. "There'll be no newspaper scandal and public exposure now. He has gone before the higher court. Wait here. Let no one enter. We must call it a drink suicide."

Daly leaped away like a leopard on the chase to be the first to seal Mrs. Willoughby's lips forever as to this happening, and to hand over the document which had cost the dead scoundrel his life. With grave faces, the detectives watched the stiffening form upon the floor. The "rising star" had set forever!

Only the silent, weeping, widowed woman at the Hotel Savoy knew the whirlwind of baffled hate which had filled Vreeland's wretched breast as he staggered away from his wife's rooms that morning.

Their quarrel had been the unveiling of an unpunished crime—a tangle of sin and shame.

For smarting under the loss of a "financial backer" who could not refuse him money advances, Vreeland had faced his wife with the direct query, so long withheld, as to her separate property.

"You must now aid me with your cash, money, property or whatever else you have. Garston's death leaves me without a friend."

Standing among the scattered pyramids of fashion's evening uniforms, Katharine Vreeland turned her bright, defiant eyes upon the half-insane speculator. How she despised him in her guilty heart!

"I have neither money nor friends. All I had to hope for died with James Garston. You were not man enough to demand an accounting of the living.

"And now death pays all debts. I have absolutely nothing to show—"

Vreeland had seized his wife's wrist.

"You were his—"

"Ward," quietly retorted the beautiful rebel.

"And, sir, you took me as I took you, on trust! They told me that you were rich. I find you out to be a mere coward—a fool and a weakling, too! You have thrown away the handsome fortune which James Garston gave you. What has become of your own money?

"And your humbug 'business interests' down in Wall Street. Were you, too, only an 'outside agent'

for Mrs. Willoughby—a mere paper screen for her speculations? What have you to show me?”

Vreeland's whitened face proved his silent rage. “Our paths separate here!” bitterly said Katharine Vreeland. “If you have nothing, I have less. Not even a husband! Do you see that door?” she cried, with flashing eyes.

“Never cross its threshold again. Leave me to my dead friend, my dead hopes, my dead heart—and my poverty.” She was brave to the last, even in her abandonment.

With a last curse, lost upon the ears of the defiant woman now hidden in her own room, Vreeland had turned away to his flight, leaving his wife penniless, and he departed with but one last mad hope.

To bear away Justine Duprez, the only witness, to rescue the incriminating document, and then divide with the artful Frenchwoman the remaining twenty thousand dollars of the loan forced from Garston. For his deserted wife he had not even a thought!

“Once safe in Paris, Justine can easily hide me there. I can easily extort a fortune from Mrs. Willoughby and her rich associates. Justine can marry and have her petit hôtel. The document will be a wellspring of flowing golden treasure.”

And so in his last hours of life, the woman whom he would once have sacrificed became his only hope, and to draw her to his presence at their only safe trysting place he had gone to the “Circassia” for the last time. But she could not see his furtive signals, his hovering around. She herself was under lock and key now!

The artful schemer proved in death the truth of Mr. James Potter's favorite adage, for his punishment

"came around, like everything else, to the man who waited," and he only waited in vain, for Justine Duprez's footfall. But, grim Death found him out red-handed in his miserable treachery.

Judge Endicott was closeted with Mrs. Willoughby as Roundsman Dan Daly sprang into the room and led the trembling woman to a corner.

When they were alone, Daly whispered:

"Just step into your own room and see if this is all right.

"For God's sake, never tell a human soul how you got it back. I have gone beyond my duty to get this into your hands. I would be cast off the force, punished and disgraced."

The old lawyer heard Elaine Willoughby's cry of affright when Daly told her that Vreeland lay dead by his own hand in the squalid trysting place of sin.

Hugh Conyers, with a fine prescience of some coming tragedy, had held the boy messenger under his own eye in the rooms where he sat guarding Justine until her partner in crime should have been seized.

"Let no one know, not even him!" begged Daly. "Let the world always think it to have been a suicide induced by drink and overspeculation. I can cover it all up.

"Your daughter is safe now. Trust to no one but Conyers. Tell him the whole story, for, he loves the very ground you walk on."

There was a strange pallor on Elaine's face as she laid her finger on her lips.

"You have saved the happiness of three women, their future, and their peace of heart and soul. Do not stir. I must have time to think," she whispered, as she glided away.



Murmuring, "Dead! dead! in all his unfinished villainy!" she walked calmly back into the room where the old lawyer awaited her final answer to Senator Alynton's urgent prayers.

"Go, my friend! Go! Bring Senator Alynton here at once," cried the desperate woman.

"In your presence only, I will return to him the document which he demands. And its return marks my divorce for life from the Street. I have signed my last check for stocks, and my heart says Never Again!

"Go quickly; for when Romaine arrives I wish to be only the Lady of Lakemere. I have stepped down and out. I abdicate! There's no longer a Queen of the Street.

"Noel Endicott can close up all my affairs under your directions."

"And, Vreeland?" anxiously cried Judge Endicott. The woman's lips trembled. "I shall never see him again," she faltered.

"Go now, for my strength fails, and I wish to be rid of the dangerous trust forever—this terrible paper which is lying a weight upon my heart."

When the old advocate hastened away, then Elaine Willoughby turned like a tigress at bay.

"Bring Conyers here. I must think! Think! You may yet save us all!" The policeman darted away.

In five minutes, Daly had recounted the whole story to Hugh Conyers, who sat holding the woman's trembling hands.

"I must go back now. Give me your orders. The newspapers are all that I fear! We must outwit them."

"Is there not a French restaurant on the ground floor of this haunt down there?" said Conyers.

"Yes, yes!" impatiently cried Daly.

"Then," calmly answered Hugh Conyers, "the story goes as follows: Vreeland, after a hard-drinking bout, had secretly wandered, half-mad, upstairs and took his life in the first room found open.

"You will remove his body to the Elmleaf apartments. I will send young Kelly down there to prepare Bagley for the last visit of his master."

"And must I notify the Coroner when the body is there?" demanded the Roundsman, in admiration of the plan.

"Yes, and tell your own story. Keep the deputy marshals quiet. I'll see that they are all well rewarded. I will telephone down to the Wall Street office that Mr. Vreeland has died by accident. I will meet Maitland, Wyman and Noel Endicott at the Elmleaf.

"One of them can go over and notify Vreeland's wife, and so, the whole thing rests safely in our hands."

"Helms and Mulholland?" questioned Roundsman Daly.

"Let them be safely locked up in Ludlow Street Jail, separately. The poor letter-carrier will soon confess, and he can be pardoned. He has only been a tool. Helms can be allowed to leave the country. He will never talk!

"And to-night, I will face Justine with Martha Wilmot, and then have her whole confession."

"That scoundrel, Doctor Alberg?" moodily demanded Daly, as he moved to the door.

"He will never be heard of after the news of Vreeland's suicide is published. Let him slink away; that will be the easiest way to get rid of him."

When Daly had departed, Mrs. Willoughby clasped

both Conyers' hands in her trembling palms. The grateful light in her eyes was shadowed with tears.

"You would save me, Hugh?" she faltered.

"All trouble, all annoyance, all sorrow," said the journalist, as he rose. "I must be busy now. See no one. Speak to no one, and above all never tell Endicott nor Alynton nor any single living soul the baseness of the man who lies dead down there."

"You are my saviour," she murmured; "I will obey; I have only one matter to close up with Senator Alynton, and then, I am free," she said with downcast eyes.

As Conyers went sadly away, he moodily added: "And that is to answer 'Yes' to his offer of his hand and fortune."

Hugh Conyers was absent, engaged in throwing the mantle of charity about Vreeland's sudden death, when Senator Alynton was led into Elaine's presence by Judge Endicott.

It was only a matter of a few moments for the load to be lifted from the woman's agitated heart. "There is no receipt needed," gravely said Endicott.

"Of course the possession of such a paper is as dangerous to friend as foe. I have no fears that any one will ever call on Mrs. Willoughby for it again."

Alynton gazed upon the troubled face of the woman whose empire over his heart only grew more perfect day by day.

"I must come to you at another time. Can I write?" he murmured. And Elaine Willoughby bowed her head in silence then, for his speaking eyes told the story of a life's hopes. He forebore, in sheer mercy, to press his suit upon her now.

The great Senatorial millionaire gazed uneasily at

Endicott. "I heard a strange rumor down at the Waldorf from young Wiltshire, about Vreeland's individual failure on the Street being announced."

"Not another word, I beg, Senator," hurriedly said the old lawyer, courteously taking his arm.

"My client has been too sadly shocked," and with the promise of his own return in the evening, Endicott led his captive away.

"Thank God! They know nothing as yet!" cried the Lady of Lakemere, as she called Mary Kelly to her side.

It seemed to the agitated woman that the iron jaws of fate had closed just behind her, and in her grateful heart she saw her only champion, Hugh Conyers—strong, brave, true, silent and tender. Her loyal and silent knight!

The words of honest Dan Daly came back to her now. A rosy blush flamed upon her cheeks as she fled away from the tender-hearted Mary Kelly's watchful eyes. "Some day he shall know all, he shall know my whole heart."

And when the telegraph messenger, just then arriving, had departed, she fell back in a happy swoon of delight, for she had read the words which filled her with sweet surcease of sorrow:

"Coming Saturday; Touraine. Love from Sara and Romaine."

It was nearly midnight when Justine Duprez's broken sobs concluded her last hastily constructed tissue of lies. The schoolboy guard had inadvertently yielded up to her the news of Harold Vreeland's death in a moment of youthful pride. And she was scheming to free herself now of the inconvenient steel

jewelry which had so broken her spirit. It was a *sauve qui peut!*

When faced by Conyers, with Martha Wilmot at his side, in the presence of her sternly silent mistress, Justine caught at the last straw. She knew all the weaknesses of her mistress' womanly heart.

"I know why poor Monsieur Vreeland killed himself. He loved my mistress madly, and he feared that the rich Senator Alynton was going to marry her. He had bribed me to tell him all about Senator Alynton's visits and of the love-making. He was surely half-mad when he married that heartless woman.

"Poor Vreeland! He suffered from a hopeless love! He feared that Alynton would marry my mistress, and he feared, too, that he would then be discharged from the Wall Street business." Mrs. Willoughby was trembling in a silent rage.

She dared not face a new whirlwind of gossip, and so, the sly Frenchwoman had saved herself.

"But, you stole your mistress' letter and gave it to him," coldly broke in Conyers. He realized, too, that the story of Senator Alynton's love-making would desperately compromise Mrs. Willoughby, and the maid could easily poison the public mind.

"I did not!" stoutly ejaculated the lying Frenchwoman. "Vreeland bribed the German doctor—that cowardly scoundrel Alberg—to have this very woman here steal the love-letter, and she secretly gave it to Alberg, and then he gave it to Vreeland. They are both liars!

"I was afraid of Vreeland. He threatened to have me discharged," sobbed Justine. "And I know that my mistress was very near to loving him at one time.



The whole truth will come out at my trial. I am innocent. I shall demand the aid of the French Consul." Conyers and Elaine shuddered at this threat of noisy publicity.

"You met him at your rooms," angrily broke in Conyers, who now saw Elaine's agony. The girl had skillfully hidden her face in her hands. It was her last chance.

"He paid me well for my trouble. I am poor, so poor, and I was afraid that I might be accused of stealing the letter. He himself spirited this lying woman away. And I am to be sacrificed! The public shall be my generous jury. I will tell the story to the whole world. You dare not ruin me!"

Conyers' eyes met his beloved one's in an awkward silence. Then he returned once more to the attack.

"There were the tell-tale wires and the criminal tapping of the telegraph and telephone." Conyers was less harsh in his accusations now, for even Martha Wilmot was appalled by the Frenchwoman's audacity. Justine Duprez felt firmer ground under her now. Her glib answer was ready!

"Vreeland undoubtedly paid the letter-carrier and the janitor. He was madly determined to prevent the marriage with Alynton, at any cost. He knew that the Senator disliked him, and would soon cast him out. You can call those two men before me here. I will face the whole world, and tell them how the poor young man died for a love which he had been led into. Why did my mistress pick him up? For a summer's amusement? The fine lady's game. She drove poor Hathorn to madness. And, she is, of course, a fine lady!"

Hugh Conyers was called from the room, leaving

Elaine Willoughby trembling there, with her pale cheeks tinged with a sudden flame.

There was no defense against this flood of vulgar abuse. Her soul recoiled at the threatened publicity. The sanctity of her heart was being violated by this brutal traitress, now alert in the defense of her liberty. And there were the dangerous secrets of the Sugar ring to keep! She was now paying the price of her own rashness.

Conyers soon returned, and led his beautiful charge to the end of the room.

"Alberg has escaped!" he whispered. "He sailed from Hoboken on a Norwegian tramp steamer to-day. Daly reports that Helms and Mulholland have been eagerly racing to confess.

"Mulholland blames the drink curse, and says that Vreeland paid him to help steal a rival's love-letters, 'only to beat the game' of that hated one. Helms stubbornly stands out and swears that Vreeland bribed the electrician to tap the wires so as to overhear Mrs. Willoughby's lawyer talking over the impending marriage. So you see, the lying jade will have witnesses to back up her story."

"What must I do? Tell me, Hugh. You are my only friend," faltered Elaine, grasping his arm convulsively. "There is my child. Think of the agony to her—the shame of such disclosures! My new-found darling!"

"Yes, and there are the newspaper scandals to fear—the worst feature. We could not try these people and dare to openly prove the real facts. Even a French maid's gossip and babble can find believers," sadly said Hugh, with averted eyes. He well knew the callous gossips!

"You would only estrange Alynton, plunge your

daughter into a useless sorrow, and your whole life story would be bruited abroad. I can not bear to see you disgraced, Elaine," he faltered.

"I have a plan," he said slowly. "Keep the woman Justine here. I will pay her and ship her off to Paris. Dan Daly will see that she goes. Let us only frighten her! She will be only too glad to escape her rightful punishment—the lying jade! You have recovered your dangerous document. You do not need Martha Wilmot now. Let me separate these people at once!

"Martha goes back first to England. Alberg is gone, and of course the nurse can not be convicted. There is no direct evidence. I will have Mulholland quietly released; Daly can answer for him. Helms we will call quits with, on his frankly signing a full confession, naming only himself, and I give him a passage over to Hamburg. And this will stop Justine's mouth forever."

"And the disposition of Justine?" murmured the white-faced woman.

"She stays here only till Vreeland is buried, and I then will have her properly paid off before the Consul, and see her on the French steamer myself. I know the French Consul very well. She will never return. It is the only way to bury the whole past in Vreeland's grave.

"For, only in this way, Daly can quietly aid me to frighten a written confession out of each of our other captives. And then the courts, newspapers and the public must perforce remain out of the affair. I have to go now and see Wyman and Endicott about the arrangements for Vreeland's funeral, as his widow refuses to see any human being. That marriage was only part of some abortive scheme, ruined by Garston's

death. I should say that you had seen enough of Wall Street now."

"Use full power, any money; let it be as you wish," said Elaine, leaving the room without a word to the two women. "I trust you of all men!" she had whispered at parting. And yet Conyers only sighed wearily.

Conyers, adroitly separating the two culprits, hastened to give his directions to Roundsman Daly, who led away Martha Wilmot to begin her preparations for a return voyage. He saw the cogency of Conyers' smothering policy. "Best end for a bad job all round," said the blunt policeman.

It was midnight when Daly and Conyers finished the details of the plan, which they quickly carried out.

The new deal left only Justine Duprez, a moody, self-torturing woman, lingering along under surveillance, until she grasped at her safety by an implicit obedience. She was now humbled and eager for departure. She well knew that Vreeland's grave hid her only friend.

"Thank heaven, Daly!" said Conyers. "I have 'squared' all the reporters, you have done the same for the police, and I think after the two men are buried, that a week will find them both forgotten in the swim! So runs the modern world away!"

"I am glad of the whole ending," said honest Daly. "For as Mrs. Willoughby has promised to give Mary a home of her own, and she needs her services no more, I shall soon ask you to my wedding, and, I also hope to hear of your own."

"You just go ahead and get married, Dan," laughed Conyers. "I have waited a good many years, and I

am in no hurry. I belong to the great reading public, my hydra-headed master! There is no place for love in the study. Cupid is a poor penman."

It was a fortunate matter that Senator Alynton was busied for a week with the imposing obsequies of James Garston, for, the private funeral of Harold Vreeland was passed over with little remark by the man who had been his enemy. Alynton had been quieted by the return of the document, and now, no troublesome heirs of Garston could ever unearth the secret compact.

Overspeculation and the pace that kills, told the whole story of Vreeland's downfall, and a new golden sign, "Wyman & Endicott," had replaced the last public evidence of Vreeland's meteoric rise and fall, even before the sod rested upon the forgotten suicide.

Two black-robed women met at the side of Senator James Garston's coffin in a sad silence.

The face of neither was visible, and when the last solemn words of public farewell were spoken, neither dreamed that under the two impenetrable crape veils were hidden the woman whom he had loved most, and the woman who had once loved him, with all the despair of a lost soul.

There is a mercy in the freezing silence of death which often hides that which would only rend the more hearts already strained to the snapping of the last chord.

Only those cheerful young club men, Messrs. Wiltshire, Rutherford and Merriman, noted the proud eminence of Mrs. Volney McMorris as guide, companion and friend to the widowed ward of the dead Senator. The duenna was a skeleton key of society, fitting easily into every dead lock, and well oiled.



"The little woman will have a great fortune," said Merriman. "I hear that Garston has left a half of his wealth to her. It comes in very handy now, for, poor Vreeland was struggling in the breakers.

"She will be a great catch in due time," was the chorus, and, when they separated, each gilded youth had separately registered a vow to "make up" to Mrs. McMorris, and then to go in later for the golden prize, when that black crape had softened to lilac, and afterward in due time bleached out into cheerful white, with here and there a touch of returning color. And they all knew Katharine Norreys' good points by a personal experience of the last fleeting twelve months.

*Vae victis!* The defeated suicide was borne away to an humble grave by a few of the men who had shared his brief prosperity. The three watchful club men, already secret rivals, were on hand, there to note, with surprise, the absence of the widow, who was reported to be "broken down by her guardian's recent death" and "unable to appear." And so, in the last mournful parade the star performer was absent. It was voted a dull affair.

No one ever knew in "society" of the secret visit made by Katharine Vreeland, under Hugh Conyers' escort, to take a last look at the features of the man who had "failed along the whole line of life," after all. The defeated "young Napoleon!" The Loch-invar of the West! But the peace which he had never known had settled upon Vreeland's pallid face.

Conyers had gravely given Mrs. Vreeland a few words of caution as to the late "envied of all his set."

"I thank you, sir, calmly said the marble-faced woman. "I have buried his past forever, and your

protecting counsels are not in vain; for, I unfortunately, knew him as he was. I shall leave New York forever, for, penniless as I am, I will have now to earn my bitter daily bread, but at least in some other place than here.

Conyers gazed wonderingly at her. "Did you not know that Senator Garston has left you half his fortune? You will be a rich woman. I have seen a certified copy of the will." And then the pale-faced woman reeled at this last proof of a fidelity reaching beyond the grave. Garston had been game to the core!

Conyers sprang to the side of the fainting woman, who murmured, with trembling lips, "He loved me! He loved me, at the last!"

With an infinite pity in his heart, Conyers gazed at the broken-hearted lonely widow. "Here is some strange new mystery," he mused. "Thank God that it is sacred from me." And then he told her of all the cautious actions of the Trust Company, which was now only awaiting the arrival of Miss Romaine Garland for the proper legal notifications. And so, the romance of a sweet sin remained sealed from all hearts but the one throbbing in Katharine Vreeland's guilty bosom!

And thus in a week two young women who had never met before in life listened, with grave lawyers at their sides, to the publication of the formal news of an equal division of Garston's great fortune between a now widowed ward, of whose past history the world knew nothing, and Miss Romaine Garland, at whose side Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, Judge Endicott and Hugh Conyers sat as a loving bodyguard. Even the "hardy reporter" was baffled by the guarded solemnity of the Surrogate proceedings. Scandal slept on its arms for once!

Katharine Norreys Vreeland saw that the beautiful stranger was robed in deep mourning like herself, and she started back in surprise as the lovely face was unveiled when Elaine Willoughby brought the two heiresses together in a private room.

"It is only to you here that I will say," solemnly remarked the Lady of Lakemere, "that the settlement of the estate business will not require you to meet again. The Trust Company will properly close up all the details, and your personal lawyers can arrange all your affairs separately with them.

"I know," she slowly said, with a broken voice, "that Senator Garston left no personal wishes, and that his trust for each of you was merely private and a personal one. He had no near relatives to quarrel with his final dispositions."

"Can it be," murmured Katharine Vreeland, "that another life secret is buried in his pulseless heart?"

But she was soon left alone, for the mother and daughter, with a grave inclination of their heads, had passed out of her life forever.

And, thrilled with a strange feeling of loyalty to the man who had been loyal to her at the last—the man who had died true to the unspoken secret which a kindly fate had so strangely guarded—Katharine Vreeland never sought to cross the gulf of that new-made grave.

That French Pandora Justine Duprez, had reached Paris, and the reunited mother and daughter were linked in a rapturous love at Lakemere, long before Romaine Garland listened to a few words spoken to her by the old advocate, who had undertaken her affairs. He had sought her out in a lonely nook of the new paradise.

Judge Endicott, with a prophetic instinct, saw the unrest which possessed the young girl's heart. He had a delicate duty to perform, to which his chivalric love for Elaine Willoughby prompted him.

"I must, my dear young lady," he began, eying her face keenly, "deal with you directly and alone, in the matter of your inheritance from the late Senator Garston.

"Your beloved mother needs an absolute repose of mind and nerves. I wish to lay a friendly charge upon you.

"I will relieve you of all cares as to your affairs with the Trust Company.

"Let it be your task to make your mother's life as bright as possible. She will learn to live a new life in your love."

And then, the silver-haired Judge delicately led the dark-eyed girl along to imagine the shadow of an old family tragedy as having darkened her mother's early lonely womanhood.

"There are reasons why you should spare all references to—"

"My father! my father!" cried the sobbing girl, burying her face in her hands.

Endicott gazed at her in a pitying silence.

"The story of the estrangement of two partners and your mysterious inheritance is one not fully known to me, but you can cherish the memory of James Garston as one faithful to the trust of a stormy past, whose echoes I beg you never to awaken.

"Should your beloved mother marry Senator Alyn-ton, one of America's noblest men, you would find his counsels wise, his honored name a shelter, and your



securely invested fortune, of course, now makes you independent of all possible financial disaster.

"The same caution holds as to Mrs. Katharine Vreeland, who has already left New York for a protracted sojourn abroad.

"There are sorrows which are sacred. It rests with you alone to bring back the happiness which she craves to your mother's sorely tried heart." The old gentleman paused, for the proud girl's cheeks were glowing.

"Shall we be allies?" he simply said. "I have served your mother, the noblest woman whom I ever met, in loyalty for fifteen long years." The grateful girl smiled through her tears.

"There is my hand!" Romaine Garland cried. "I see that you would have me understand why my mother does not openly explain to society my different name and my clouded childhood. You require my silence as to the past."

"Precisely, my dear young lady," said the gallant old lawyer, as he fled happily away. "I have plausibly explained what I do not care to know myself, Conyers!" remarked the Judge, next day, to the grave-faced journalist. "But the whole thing will right itself when Senator Alynton marries the mother. I presume after her return from their trip abroad that Elaine Willoughby will find her final heart-rest in a good man's love."

But when Endicott had finished his cogitations he was alone, for Hugh Conyers had hastily excused himself on the plea of urgent business.

Endicott honestly believed that Garston had only held back Romaine's property to prevent a marriage with Alynton.

Mr. James Potter, driving down the avenue a few



days later, bowed with deep respect to Mrs. Elaine Willoughby, who was passing, with her lovely daughter seated by her side. He turned to his wife, whose face was averted.

"I wonder," said he, "if that plunger Vreeland really impaired her fortune. He was a most reckless and insinuating scoundrel, and he diligently hunted his punishment. He, however, saved the State the trouble of keeping him in Sing Sing for a term of years, for it would surely have come around to him.

"One-half the energy devoted to being an honest man that he expended in his schemes would have made him a colossal success."

But the Lady of the Red Rose at his side only sighed in a silent relief, for with a shudder she recalled what a permanent guarantee of safety for herself—for her past recklessness—lay in the immovable seal of death affixed to Harold Vreeland's pallid lips.

And in the crowded "Street," as well as in the glittering booths of Vanity Fair, the light-headed men and women hurrying on in pursuit of the iridescent bubble Pleasure, or the Fool's Gold, soon forgot that a stealthy-eyed man of conquering mien had ever come from the West to dazzle them for a moment. "*Étoile qui file et disparaît!*"

In the dark waters of Lethe soon was 'whelmed the memory of the man who had so miserably perished in the "swim."

The fleecy mantle of winter snows covered the "eligibly located" mound in Greenwood, where a marble cenotaph was soon to proudly record the many virtues of James Garston, and the same pallid mantle of charity hid the lonely mound in humbler Woodlawn

where Harold Vreeland slept the sleep that knows no waking.

He was already forgotten in the bustling Street, where the new firm of "Wyman & Endicott" was a stately and established fact. "*Le roi est mort! Vive le roi.*"

By some subtle freemasonry of the guild of Midas, the whole stock-dealing coterie soon knew that Mrs. Elaine Willoughby had doffed her crown as Queen of the Street.

The iron reserve of her former secret agents was never broken, and none knew and few cared whither she had gone out of the maddening whirl and, whether with full or empty coffers.

The social world knew, though, that the splendid apartment at the "Circassia" was dismantled, and the various society journals announced the impending departure of the Lady of Lakemere "for a residence abroad of some years." Garston's death had proved a bombshell, scattering several little coteries.

Only old Hiram Endicott gravely shook his head at the mysterious movements of his social friends. The match-making prophecy seemed clouded.

Senator Alynton was busied dealing sturdy blows in the Senate at his party's foes, and beyond a final conference arranging for the closing out of all past relations of his fair client with the Sugar Syndicate, Endicott followed neither the affairs of the giant partnership in Gotham nor their secret allies in Washington.

He was busied with much legal detail in arranging Mrs. Willoughby's manifold affairs for a protracted absence. "I wish all to be in order, Judge," she said, "for I know not what may happen, and

Romaine's future must be assured." The bright-faced girl had simply stormed her loving mother's heart.

"There is only one way to assure it," gravely answered the old lawyer. "You must marry, for the child's sake. This past life of yours has been a lonely, a wasteful and a forced one.

"Now that you are out of stocks forever, now that you have found a new happiness in that charming girl, it is for you alone to build a barrier for her against the future fortune-hunter or scheming knave.

"There are more Hathorns and Vreelands in the world than those two dead speculating lovers."

"Whom would you have me marry?" asked Margaret Cranstoun, gazing demurely at her chivalric friend—the man who even now possessed but half her life secret.

Her woman's heart was now beating wildly with a suggestion which she dared not own.

"Why, Alynton, of course! One of America's most brilliant men, a man already of national reputation," slowly rejoined the old lawyer.

He opened his eyes in a startled surprise as the beautiful woman frankly said, with a merry laugh:

"I certainly can not consider his proposal—until he makes it!"

She fled away, however, to confer with Noel Endicott upon the final closing accounts of the banking firm in which she was leaving a handsome sum as "special partner."

Both the Lady of Lakemere and the old Solon were now playing at "hoodman blind." And Hugh Conyers felt himself of little use now, for the clouds had all vanished. He was no fair-weather friend.

Elaine's heart was light when she saw how completely Endicott had deceived himself. "Fate is still kind to me; no one knows, no one shall ever know," she murmured, locking up a fond woman's secret in her throbbing breast. It was not yet the appointed time of the final surrender of her self-sovereignty.

There was merriment at Lakemere, where Sara Conyers watched with a secret satisfaction the increasing intimacy of Noel Endicott with the beautiful girl who had so strangely drifted into a loving mother's arms.

For Noel came daily now, "on business"—the road seemed to shorten every day with use—and the guest chamber of Lakemere which he most affected was his real headquarters. "There was so much to arrange for the retirement of the queen."

"I shall let Senator Alynton know privately of Elaine's projected absence," wisely decided the sagacious Judge Endicott. "He should have a fair field," and to this end the old lawyer counseled with Hugh Conyers, now busy and preoccupied.

"There is a strong, able, wise man," said Endicott. "Just the man to make her a good husband!" The Judge was astounded at Conyers' complete indifference.

"I may go over to England soon on a long assignment," shortly said Hugh. "You might speak to my sister. These are, after all, things for women's advice. I am no squire of dames. I think of giving up active journalism now."

Endicott then reflected that Hugh Conyers' face was rarely seen now in the happy coterie at Lakemere. The delicate details of covering all of the tragic past from Romaine Garland were all completed. "I wonder what is the matter with him?" growled Endi-

cott. "I looked for his help to bring about this marriage."

Hugh's last work had been to close up the "Elm-leaf" headquarters, and to direct Bagley, now the head butler at Lakemere, in storing the scattered effects of the unhappy suicide.

For Mrs. Katharine Norreys Vreeland had departed for Europe, and, even the International Trust Company refused to disclose her address or whereabouts.

Her private lawyer, Mr. Abel Hanford, of the company's legal staff, declined to accept the ownership of the mementoes of the dead adventurer and guarded a grim and sullen silence.

"I am positively ordered not to disturb my client, who is in impaired health, with any references to the late Mr. Vreeland or his affairs. Sell the trash, and turn the money in to me. I will receipt for that!" It was cold comfort.

And no further word would the cool young lawyer utter, even to Horton Wyman, now anxious to legally close up all the affairs of the defunct schemer.

"Turn the whole thing then over to the Public Administrator!" was the counselor's curt order. "My client will not return to America for many years, if ever."

In all these strange happenings Miss Sara Conyers was the only one at Lakemere who was really unhappy at heart. She was the sole confidante of Romaine Garland, who now poured out all her secret conclusions upon the bosom of her faithful friend.

Romaine had seized upon Katharine Vreeland's departure as being the closing scene of the veiled mystery of her unknown father's life.

But a lucky accident helped the plans of the wise



old Judge. "I am to bury the past and all reference to it. There must have been some strange sorrow, and perhaps my co-heiress was in the past a part of some hostile element."

Completely deceived as to her birth, the young girl divided with Sara Conyers a budding mystery of sweetness and light, which she dared not as yet acknowledge upon her mother's bosom. For the Queen of the Street was a stately presence, and Romaine's maidenly heart was shy and gentle.

But Noel Endicott was daily becoming to her the joy-bringer and his "business" at Lakemere was not unseen by his astute old uncle.

"That goes on well enough!" the old lawyer chuckled, "and it will be a noble ending to the poor girl's homeless childhood. But my lady herself is a mystery." He forgot to add, "as all other women are,"—the same changeful mystery.

"She has locked up her heart and seems to be still determined to walk the lonely path. If Alynton would only speak!" The old Judge fretted and fumed among his parchments.

Loyal Sara Conyers alone, knew why her brother Hugh had studiously avoided the happy circle at Lakemere.

For old Judge Endicott's prophetic words as to Alynton's wooing rankled deep in the steadfast man's lonely heart. He waited grimly and afar off for the advent of the conquering swain, Senator Alynton.

"She needs me no more," he bitterly decided. "It is all over. I have the whole world to choose from for a future home, and as she seems to have captured Sara for life, I am now free to go my way."

And so, when the foreign station was offered him, Conyers quietly accepted it, and then leisurely prepared for his departure.

In daily close communion with Hugh Conyers' sister, the Lady of Lakemere silently wondered at his continued absence and pondered over the gravely worded letters of polite refusal which answered her hospitable biddings.

There was that strange, sweet womanly pride in Elaine Willoughby's heart, the pride of a cherished secret, which held her speechless when the words of inquiry trembled on her lips. And it seemed as if the witching breath of the tender spring, hinting of summer roses, had now bewitched the whole circle. The fern seed of invisibility drifted down on all the hidden plans slowly revolving around Lakemere. For the long winter had worn away, and the time of the singing of birds had come again.

Elaine Willoughby, hugging her undiscovered secret with a lingering pleasure, ardently sighed for the days when safe beyond the reach of all untoward accident, she could build up around her recovered daughter the paradise of a happy home beyond the seas. Of herself, of her own future, she dared not to think, for the sweet spring was stirring in her throbbing pulses.

"She will learn, she must learn, in my tenderest love, to forget that unasked question of her brooding eyes—"My father!" It is better that she never knows—best for us all." This task of induced forgetfulness was the mother's single ambition now.

The arrangements for departure were rapidly progressing, and as the time of roses came nearer, Elaine

could not disguise her increasing restlessness in noting Hugh Conyers' absence.

The saddened eyes of his sister brought a sudden alarm to Elaine's heart.

For a pride as strong as her own had kept them tenderly apart.

The modest household of Roundsman Dan Daly had been enriched with all the splendors removed from the Elmleaf, and Mary Daly daily blessed the generous hand which had given to her the home in which the very spirit of happiness seemed to have nestled.

And only there, in that modest home, of all the circle, was there peace and rest, for both the mother and daughter at Lakemere, in tender deceit, guarded the heart secrets which they dared not own.

The silent resentment of Sara Conyers against the self-banishment of her brother was now growing into a doubt of Elaine Willoughby's womanly gratitude.

"Between her and Hugh I have no choice," the angered womanly champion of an absent brother decided. "Back to our old eyrie we go together, or else, I will share Hugh's foreign exile." And she marveled at her brother's imperative injunction of silence as to his plans.

It was when Noel Endicott was feverishly closing up the last final "business affairs" at Lakemere, supplemented with some portentously long "personal conferences" with that young Diana, Miss Romaine Garland, that Judge Endicott, a grave ambassador, came up to Lakemere with news of serious moment. He was secretly Cupid's ambassador.

He was alone with the woman whose interests he had chivalrously guarded for fifteen long years.

With a sigh he returned again to the question of the marriage—the strange dead-lock which had so baffled him.

“You sail for Europe in a month. Have you nothing to say to me, Elaine? There is but one final seal to the happiness of your future life. Your marriage.”

“The Senator has an ardent advocate, my dear old friend!” Elaine answered, with beaming eyes, “but he has not yet asked for me!”

“He will,” very decidedly answered Endicott. “I have a letter, in which he asks me to arrange an interview, to formally ask your permission to come here.

“I now understand the delicacy which has held him back till all your momentous business matters have been settled and you have been relieved from all the awkwardness of your confidential relations with the two great bands of capitalists.

“He has respected your illness, your agitation over Garston’s mysterious death, and has given you time to arrange all your legal affairs and settle Romaine’s inheritance.

“Remember, he deems her to be only your ward.

“They speak now of Alynton for a leading Cabinet position. His term in the Senate is expiring; or they will give him one of the four Embassies.

“If he asks you to share his life, I would say nothing to him of the unhappy past. Romaine is now of age. She is rich beyond need. I myself never have questioned you.

“You have a right to hold back all that might shadow Romaine (God bless her!) in her possible future marriage.”

Endicott’s voice was tremblingly affectionate, and

yet the solicitude was tinged with a solemn earnestness.

The old lawyer rose and kissed the fair woman's hand. "My life-work is nearly done. Noel, as your agent, can carry on the executive affairs, and as you are off the 'Street' and out of stocks forever, you will need no lawyer, only now and then a mere bit of office counsel, and therefore I am turning over my practice soon to Headley, my partner and legal disciple. He will be to you what I have been. Alynton will call within two days."

"You wish me to marry?" said Elaine, with softly shining eyes. "Wait, wait! I may consider your advice and act favorably upon it." The happy old advocate departed, sure of his victory. It was all going on well.

Hiram Endicott was haunted by the strange smile which lit up the thoughtful face of the woman whose life as Margaret Cranstoun was now closed forever from a curious world by the sealed barriers of a dead past.

"She will surely accept him," rejoicingly muttered the happy old advocate. "Noel will then gain Romaine's heart, and there will be a royal circle gathered in coming years at Lakemere, around the once lonely fireside." But, Love that hath us in the net was weaving, ever weaving, in silence.

And the cross purposes of the unwitting actors were seemingly as unsolved as before. With a sudden craving for aid in her hour of mental indecision, that night Elaine Willoughby wrote a last appeal to the invisible Hugh Conyers:

"I must see you, Hugh, at once on a matter involving the happiness of my whole future life. Come to



me. I have no one but you to depend upon in this vitally important juncture."

As the Lady of Lakemere mentioned to her now all-potent representative, Sara Conyers, the impending visit of Senator David Alynton, she saw, with a womanly intuition, an indignant flash of unspoken resentment in her friend's eyes.

Suddenly forgetting her usually affectionate "Good-night," the startled hostess fled away to her own room, and not daring to look at her own face in the mirror, seized the letter directed to the recalcitrant Hugh and tore it into little fragments.

"I understand!" she whispered with self-accusing timidity, and now strangely fearful of her own judgment, her heart leaping up in defense of the absent man. "It would be too cruel! I dare not, and yet how will he ever know?" Dan Cupid, from rosy clouds, smiled roguishly upon her slumbers that night.

The brooding peace of Lakemere was left undisturbed by the lively heiress and Miss Sara Conyers, who had managed to have "sudden business" in the city during the formal visit of Senator Alynton.

And so there was no one to see the proud man go forth with a man's saddest burden in his heart. She loved another!

No one of the obsequious attendants saw a graver shade than ordinary settle down upon the face of the statesman when he turned his stately head at the park gates in a last adieu to the graceful woman who stood with her earnest eyes following his departing form.

"God bless her now and always!" the saddened suitor murmured, even in his heart's sorrow.

The noble simplicity of Alynton's tender of his hand, the tribute laid at her feet of a choice between

the honors of the Cabinet and a foreign place of splendid precedence—the manly words in which he told her of his grave solicitude for her happiness, and the real reasons for his past reticence, all had touched her heart with a womanly pride in this man's honest love.

"I could not tell him the whole truth, for the child's sake; and, less than the whole truth, would be an outrage to his faith and a blot upon my womanhood."

Judge Endicott now followed her with mute accusing eyes, for he feared the ruin of his hopes.

It was a week before Romaine Garland's head sought her friend's bosom.

"Sara," she whispered, "do you know that we sail next week? Your brother must come and say adieu, for it is more than she can bear. I have a secret to tell you. I need your help. I need his friendship. Only Hugh can help me with my mother, for this parting from Noel is almost death to me. She must know the truth, but how?"

The elder woman raised the loving girl's glowing face to her own and fondly kissed her trembling lips:

"Ah! this is an easy task for you! I can guess your secret, darling," Sara sadly said. "But, I am going away to share Hugh's lot.

"I do not sail to Europe with you. I have not yet told your dear mother.

"For she will know it soon enough, and then over there, beyond the sea, you will live in new scenes, with other friends to share your happy hours. You will be soon called back—there, don't deny it.

"And your mother—who would not love her?" The blushing girl was seized with a sudden impulse, love's chords were thrilling in her heart.

It was on that very afternoon that Miss Romaine

Garland drove resolutely to the station and indited a telegram which brought Hugh Conyers promptly to the door of Lakemere, as the setting sun was dropping behind the western hills of the Highlands. He feared the very worst; some sudden disaster.

The mystified face of his loving sister at once undeceived the man whose heart had been so strangely stirred by Miss Mischief's imperative dispatch. For, the Silent Knight had "reported for duty." It was a lovingly set trap.

"Nothing has really happened?" he asked, with a fear of some reserved news of unwelcome portent.

"Nothing, sir," said Elaine Willoughby, quietly, as she suddenly appeared before him, bringing a quick thrill to his heart, "but that you are now under arrest as a deserter, and so will have to stand a formal court-martial."

It was a second strategic movement on the part of Romaine Garland, that summons of her lark-like voice calling Sara Conyers to some consultation of truly feminine gravity, in the distant seclusion of her own rooms. "Miss Mischief" was *en suprême*.

And there, side by side, Elaine Willoughby and Conyers wandered away over to the summer-house, where the first roses were breathing out their promise of summer's royal richness upon the fresh crystalline air. Neither seemed willing to break the silence of their hushed hearts.

"You sent for me, Elaine?" said the man, who hardly dared to trust the sound of his own voice. It seemed to him so strange and hollow.

His hostess turned her splendid eyes toward him, and their hands met in silence.

"I did not, Hugh," she softly said. "But as I will

be away for some years, I thank God that you are here! For, I have a sacred duty to perform.

"I know not what may happen.

"Sara has just told me that she will not go to Europe with me. All seems so changed! Endicott is growing old. I have no other friend, and I am solicitous about Romaine's future. I did intend to ask you to act for me in some very grave matters, but you have lately avoided me—strangely, cruelly."

The voice was broken now, and Hugh Conyers hastened to man his last works.

He knew now how love had sealed her proud, womanly lips, for her heart was beating with his own.

"How could I come to you? If Sara had only saved me this last sorrow! When I heard from Endicott that you were to marry Alynton, I at once accepted an engagement for five years to represent the *Clarion* in Europe.

"I sail myself in a few weeks. I only waited for your departure to have my sister select our little household gods.

"For I have sworn to be a slave of the lamp no more, and so my spinning is done. I shall not return to America."

"Do not leave me, Hugh!" murmured Elaine Willoughby. "I need your friendship; I need you more than ever, now that—"

He was already striding away, for with a last convulsive grasp of her hands, he had swiftly passed on over the velvety turf toward the still opened gates.

His heart was in a mad revolt, there had been some meddling folly, and his pulses were throbbing now in a wild unrest. The agony was beyond his surface stoicism.

But, he stood as one transfixed when a voice sweet and low set his blood leaping madly through his veins.

"Hugh, come back!" The words were simple, but he turned to where the woman whom he madly loved stood awaiting him with half-outstretched arms.

"Do you not see?" she murmured. "How can I tell you what you should have known long ago?"

"You are not to marry Alynton?" cried her lover, a light of hope stealing into his eyes. His heart was flooded with a warmth of daring hopes.

"The man whom I am to marry has not yet asked me to be his wife," faintly said Elaine.

"It was only Judge Endicott's foolish solicitude for my future.

"He may have told you what his own hopes or wishes were, but only in the simple faith of a prophet before his time."

"It has been a hell on earth these long months," was Hugh's response; "and I dared not to hope—I did not know—"

"How weak and fond we women wait  
Behind our silken armor—"

whispered the splendid woman whose hand he had covered with burning kisses.

"I have loved you, have worshiped you, and have served you in perfect faith and truth since first I saw your dear face," was Hugh Conyers' confession of faith. She was gently paltering with her rebellious heart. She would bring herself to the lines of a clearly defined duty now.

"I must tell you to-night the story of a life. I must swear you to secrecy, my Hugh," faltered Margaret Cranstoun.



"For the child's sake, you alone must know every throbbing of my heart!"

He bowed his head in token of that fealty of the soul which she longed for.

"You shall be the queen to the very end, my darling!" he said. "I will lend you Sara," he simply said. "Take Romaine and her, and I will join you by Lake Malar.

"I will at first report at London, and then, they can name a man to relieve me.

"It will be the best plan, for our quiet marriage over there, will arouse no comment here.

"The gold fish in the swim will not pause to wonder, for their own reflections on the shallow water of the pool of Fashion fill their delighted eyes."

And so, they walked back, hand in hand, their hearts throbbing together in Love's royal bondage.

A week later, Judge Endicott stood upon the deck of the *Campania*, waiting to give his last greetings to the Lady of Lakemere, whose wonderful cheerfulness now boded some new springing impulse of her happy heart.

The old advocate eyed Hugh Conyers and his sister with a pleading for the confirmation of his cherished hopes. There seemed to be a happy secret linking the three travelers in a golden bond. Was Alynton's life to be crowned at last?

And the silver-haired Judge, with a secret joy, observed Noel Endicott's tall form bending over Miss Romaine Garland, whose hands were filled with those June roses which are the very daintiest seals of Cupid's pledges.

In the last moments there was vouchsafed to him the answer to the unspoken question which was

lingering on his lips, "the long-hoped-for marriage."

"I am to be married, as you advised, my dear and faithful friend," was the parting confession of the Lady of Lakemere.

"When?" demanded the delighted lawyer, as his mind reverted to the vast advantages of Senator Alynton's friendship for his favorite nephew.

"Whenever Hugh calls upon me," was Elaine's reply, as she felt her lover's strong grasp of an already imprisoned hand.

"Bless my soul! I have been blind!" cried the happy old advocate.

"So, have we all been too long, Judge!" Hugh Conyers gaily answered.

There was a little scene "not down on the bills" in the shady corner, where Romaine Garland slipped a sparkling ring upon her finger, when Noel Endicott kissed her trembling lips.

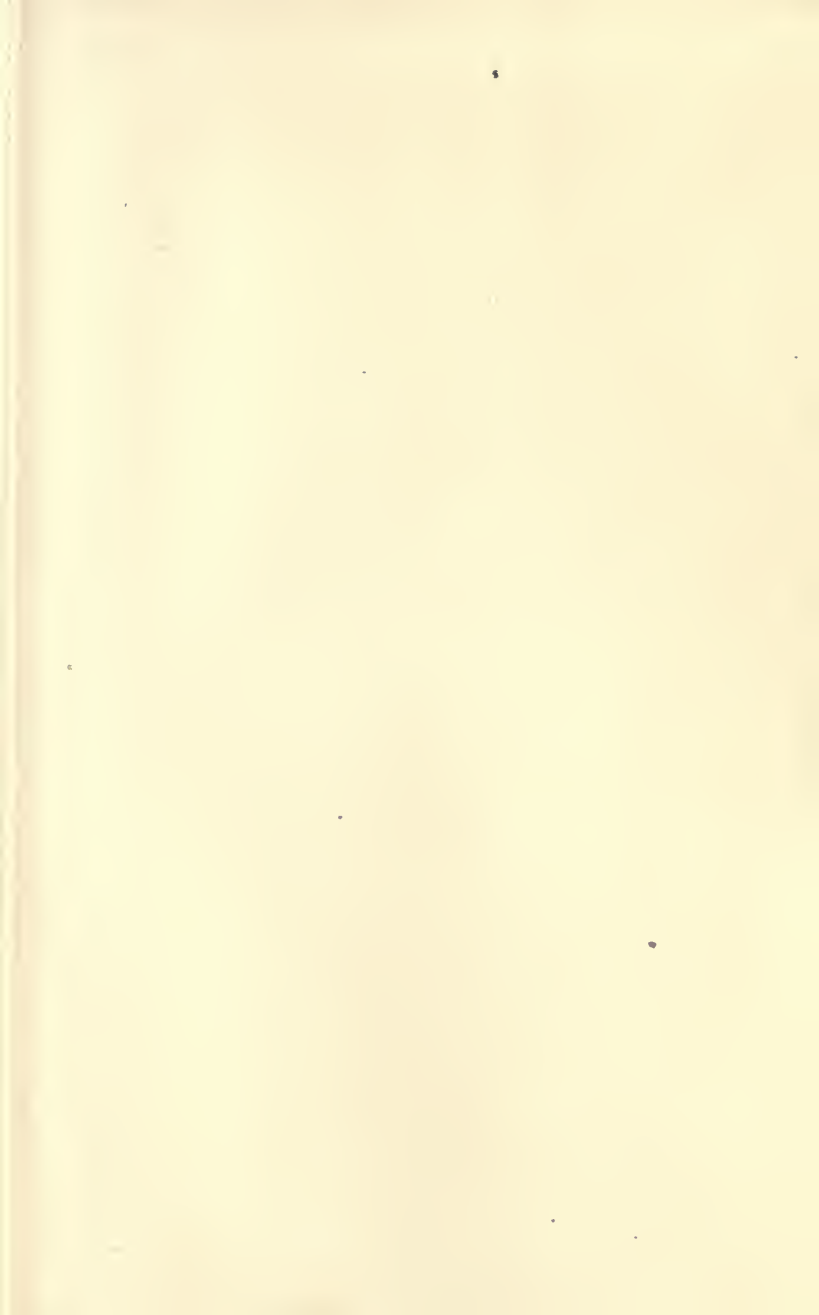
"I will tell them as soon as we are at Stockholm, and cable to you 'Come,' " was the maiden's pledge.

The uncle wondered at his nephew's loyal vigil until the stately ship was lost to sight far down the beautiful bay.

And so, Love reigned upon the darkling waters that happy night.

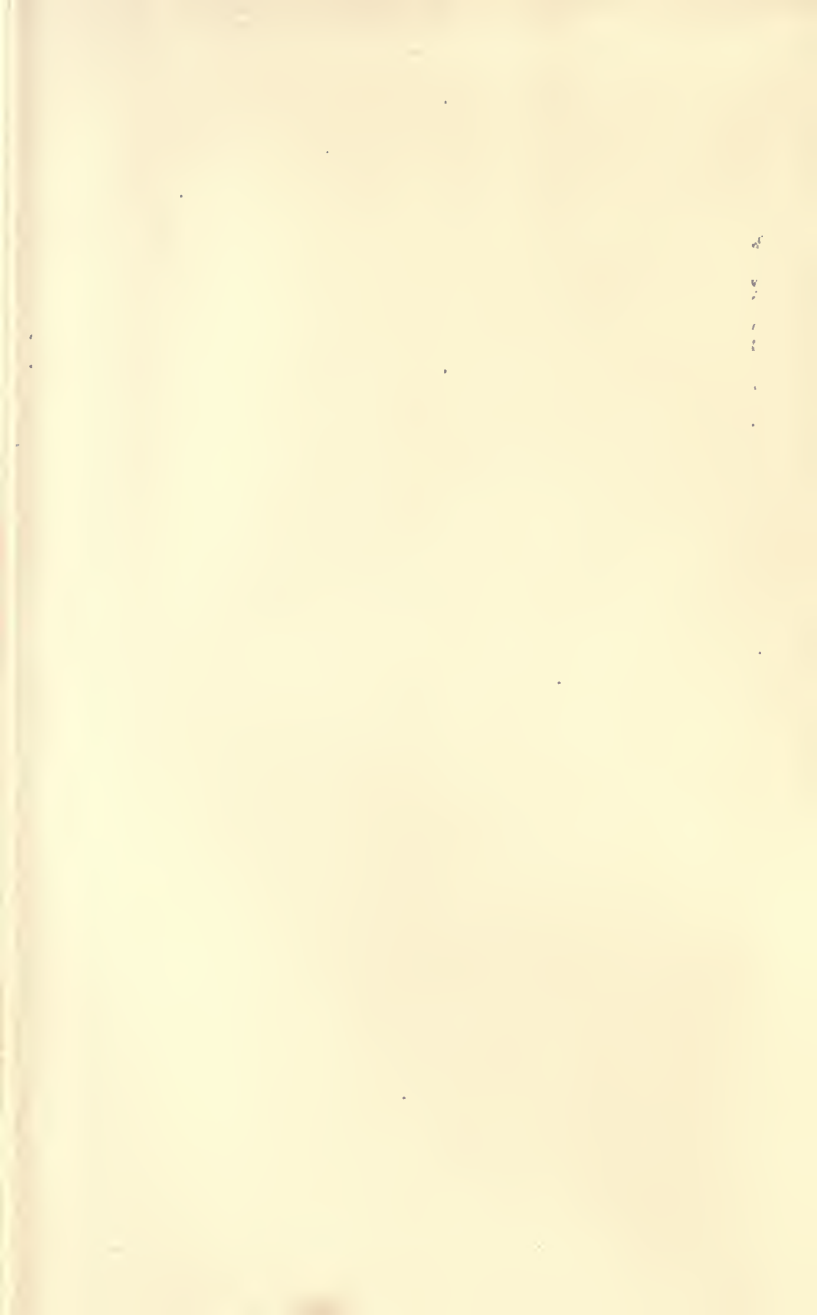
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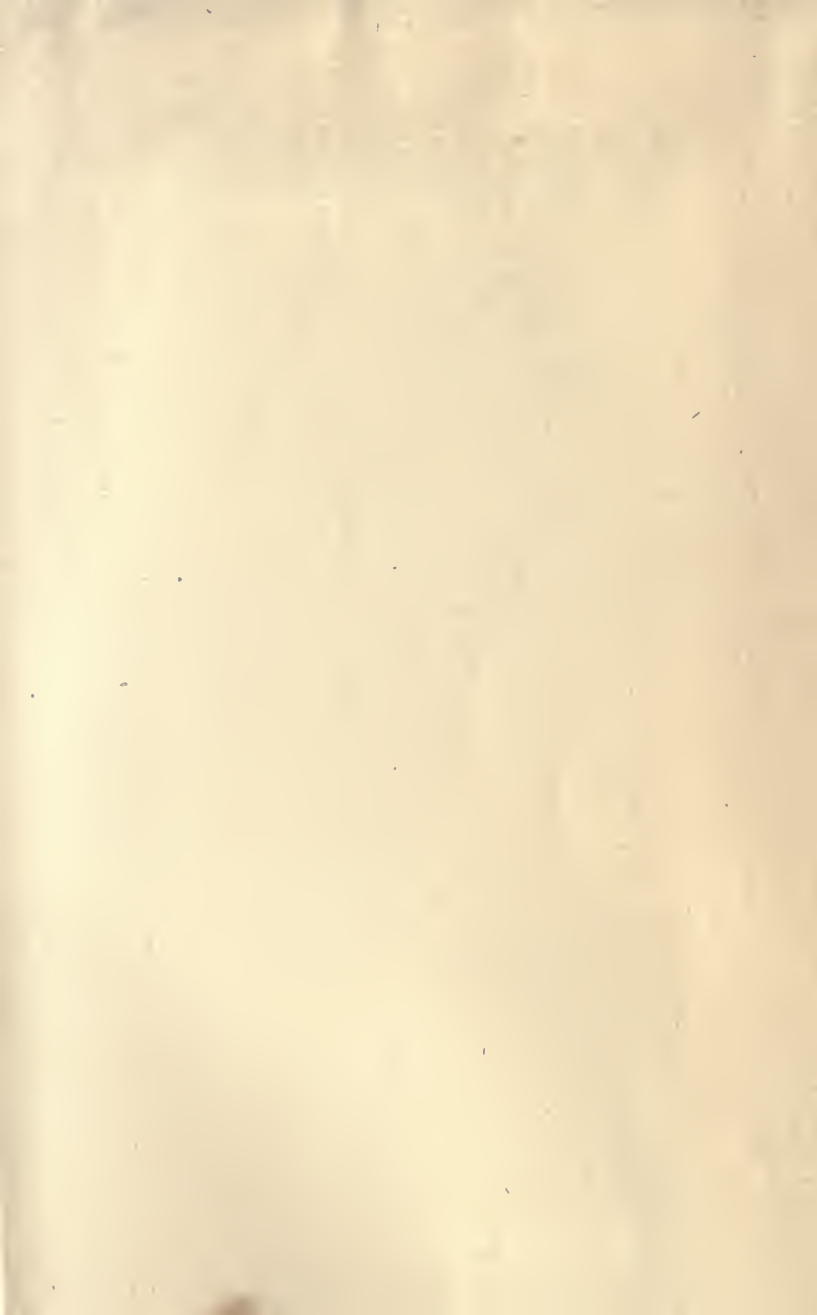












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